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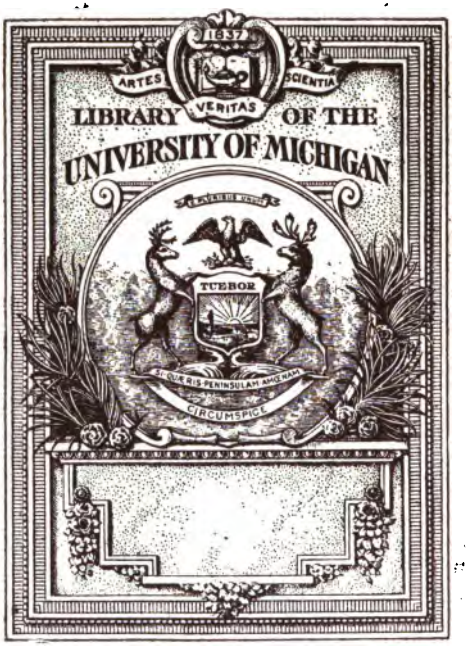

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London, One November

Chill Hours

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CHILL HOURS

BY

HELEN MACKAY

NEW YORK
DUFFIELD AND COMPANY
1920

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PART I

Chill Hours

AT THE END—ODETTE IN PINK TAFFETA—THEIR PLACES—THE SECOND HAY—ONE OR ANOTHER—THE CAULDRON.

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AT THE END

FERNANDE went to the door with her, "It has been such joy seeing you," she said, "after centuries. You were sweet to come, Diane. Why do you never go anywhere, any more? Why does no one ever see you? What do you do with yourself?"

Diane, wrapping her furs around her, did not answer.

"People say all sorts of things," Fernande went on, "that you are drowned in good works, or that there is some one. Some of them say it is an Italian, some of them say it is a Russian."

"Fernande!"

"Why, Diane, you are angry, what fun! Then it is true. Oh, Diane, you must tell me." She was between Diane and the door, standing on tip-toe before tall Diane, her blonde head tilted on one side. She stretched out her arms in their long velvet sleeves to bar the door. "You shall not go until you have told me."

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"Fernande, you are too absurd."

"Why, she is white with anger! It is desperate then!"

"Really, Fernande."

"And to have kept it so secret! Mysterious Diane!"

"Let me go, please."

"Not until you have told me who he is."

Then Diane found herself doing a thing she did not mean to do at all. She took Fernande by her two little shoulders, and swung her round away from the door, and opened the door to the hall and the stairs. "How ugly, how stupid," she heard her own voice saying, "all that sort of talk, I had forgotten, I have got so far from it. I hate it." She was out in the hall and had shut the door behind her.

As she ran down the stairs, she thought only of how she wanted to get away from Fernande's astonished face, from the things Fernande would be telling them all, there at tea. She almost ran past the porter's lodge.

But out in the cold and dark and wet she walked slowly, for her eyes were quite blind with tears, there, in the Cours la Reine.

It was not because she was angry; what Fernande, or any of them, thought or said, was of no matter at all. It had been going back to the mood

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of their world again. It had been seeing them all again, and remembering; thinking of all that Blaise and she had lost with them, lost because of them. What a beautiful thing he and she might have had of life, if that mood of the world had not caught them, a contagion. Then, too, the mimosa in the big bowl in the firelight. It had made her think of Cannes, and their wedding journey, ages ago, eight years ago, that might have been so beautiful, and that they had only been bored with, both of them. Now she would give anything, anything in the world, for one hour, one moment, with Blaise.

Much snow yet remained under the trees in the Cours la Reine. All these last days of snow she had been homesick for Fontaine-les-Ardennes, that she used to detest, with snow on the lawns and on the cedars, and on the old roofs of the château. The windows of her rooms had looked across the entrance court to the chapel. She remembered the snow on the pointed blue roofs, and the fretwork of grey stone, and the slim pinnacles and spire. And Blaise and she had always been so bored and so cross, in his home, that they both had been determined never to live in.

She did not know what had become of the château. Perhaps it was destroyed, the chapel

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with the blue roofs, the old cedars. She thought of the long evenings in the salon, hours and hours, Blaise's mother and her tapestry, his father playing chess with little cousin Nicole. Of late she had been obsessed by a longing to be there, all of them together, like that, once again. Now, both the father and mother of Blaise were dead. They had died within a few months of each other, after their son was prisoner in Germany. He had been a prisoner now for more than three years.

If only he and she had had something beautiful and real of life together to remember, something she might think he was remembering now. If only he knew how she had changed, if only she could think that he knew, and was glad of it. She had tried in her letters to make him understand. But they never had talked together, it was difficult to write. She searched his letters for some sign that he understood, and could find none. Perhaps her letters did not all reach him, perhaps some of his went astray. All, of course, were opened. Perhaps he could not bring himself to write of what was so their own, for others, enemies, to read; perhaps he did not like her writing as she did. It was the not knowing, the never knowing anything, that was so hard to bear.

She was walking close to the parapet above the

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river, where it was very dark and lonely, glad to be alone in the dark with her thoughts of Blaise. They were all she had, other things meant little to her. They were sad thoughts, but they were proud, too, and she kept them with her all the time.

Her careless, charming, spoilt-child husband, all this new knowledge of him she had got from piecing together the stumbling phrases of the fried-potato boy.

The boy from the barrow of the Place du Marais, standing clumsily before her, staring down at his big muddy boots on the velvet rug, had told her of Blaise, with queer words and queer rough sounds, little growls in his throat that meant things he had no words for. She had got her most passionate understanding of love and homage from the way, hunching his shoulders, he turned from her sometimes and just growled.

He, the market boy, was the one who had got through. That had been at the end of two years. There had been three of them whom chance had kept together, all wounded prisoners from the Eparges. The fried-potato boy and the banker's clerk had seen Blaise take the place of their Captain, killed beside his gun. They had seen him, Blaise, twice wounded before he went down. They had all three been together in the prison hospital

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and in the camp. They had tried four times to escape, the three together, and the fourth time the fried-potato boy had got through.

The other "copain," the banker's clerk, had been shot by the guard that caught them up at the almost despaired of place they had got to—after days and weeks of crouching and creeping and hiding and starving—where the Rhine was narrow, with safety just across. It had been at the very moment of their plunge into the river.

Blaise and the fried-potato boy had got across. Swimming, the rush of water in their ears, they had heard shot after shot from the shore behind them. They had got to safety. But the banker's clerk had not been there.

It was almost dark—the fried-potato boy had told Diane—they could see nothing; only guess what might have happened because of the shots. Blaise had turned back. He had thought he might save, somehow help, the banker's clerk; and, from safety, he had turned back.

The fried-potato boy had not turned back. "I had a girl, you know, here, up in the Buttes, and I thought of her, and I could not. I would have, but I could not."

Blaise had gone back, and been recaptured as he was trying to swim and keep the "copain's"

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head above water. But the "copain" had been hit, and was dying even then.

They had been taken together, and the banker's clerk had died.

It had been for nothing that Blaise had given up his freedom, and yet no story of great achievement had ever seemed to Diane more wonderful. Those years when he had not been her hero were miserably lost years. And when he should have come back—when he should have come back—all her years after would be lived just to render him homage. What a beautiful thing they would make of life together, now she knew so well what it was that made life beautiful. And now Blaise must know too, the Blaise of that splendid story knew, surely. They would need nothing but to be together. What else could matter? Anything else would be only the background for their happiness.

Already everything was the background for her dream of it. Her dream gathered in all the most ordinary things and times and places.

If one night like this, wet and cold, she were passing here with Blaise, when he should have come back, along the river, she would slip her hand into the big pocket of his coat, and keep very close against him as they walked, and say to him all those sacred, guarded things that she had never

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dared to write. She would look up into his face, by the light of every lamp they passed, for sheer love of seeing it. And always she would find him looking down at her.

II

Both the little boys were clamouring. "But Cousin Mouse, you aren't listening!"

The bigger one said, "I was telling you about the wolf and the twisted man, and you weren't listening!"

The smaller one said, "Zizi was telling you, Cousin Mouse, and you weren't listening!"

"No," she said, "I was thinking." She sat in the little chair by the nursery fire; she was so small that she seemed to belong to the little chair. She always, ever so many times a day, came to the nursery, and played wonderful games, and told stories, and sat in the little chair. But to-night everything was different. She had on an out-of-door dress, which was odd, after tea. But it was not only that. She had always been there to do just whatever it might be that the little boys wanted. Now she was not paying them any attention at all.

"What are you thinking about, Cousin Mouse?" Zizi insisted.

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She sat huddled up, her elbows on her knees and her sharp pointed, brown chin in the cup her two hands made. She stared straight into the fire and answered Zizi, as she would have answered a grown-up person. "I was thinking of how I shall tell Diane."

Zizi, standing five years tall above her as she sat in the little chair, looked down at her, and saw her brown head bent, and her brown eyes, big and solemn, shining in the firelight, and had a feeling somehow of being in church. It made him anxious. Why should Cousin Mouse have to think like that of what she was going to say? Always and always before she had said to his beautiful mother things like, "Let me do it for you, Diane." "Wouldn't you like this, or that, Diane?" He felt that to-night she was going to say something quite different, and very important.

"Cousin Mouse, what is it that you have to tell maman?"

But she did not notice even that he spoke to her. She looked into the fire and said nothing.

Before, she had always had nice things to tell his mother. "The men were delighted yesterday when you came to the hospital, they think there is nobody like you." Or, "Nobody but you would have thought of pink ribbons for the little refugee

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girls." Or, "Aunt Agnès was so pleased with your roses."

"Cousin Mouse, is it something that was in the letter?" demanded Zizi.

"The letter," little Blaise emphasized, "the letter, you know, that you ran upstairs with the minute it came, and then went out and never came back any more at all till long after tea, and then went into your room quick with the door locked, so we had to pound and pound and shout to get you."

"Is it the letter," said Zizi, "that makes you so different, Cousin Mouse? Will it make maman different too? Will it make everything different?"

Then she looked up at him, and at Blaise, but still not answering.

"Is it something you are glad about?" urged Zizi, "or something not nice? I can't make out if you are very sad about it, Cousin Mouse. Or if it makes you a queer sort of glad. But then why do you have to think so hard about telling maman? It must be sad. Are you sad, Cousin Mouse? Would you like me to fetch the puppy for you?"

Then Cousin Mouse sat up quite straight in the little chair, and flung one arm around each of the children, and gave them a hug both

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together. And then she let them go, and said, "Tell me the story quick, quick. I must know instantly about the wolf and the little twisted man."

"Once upon a time," began Zizi, sitting down on the white bearskin rug.

"There was a wolf," continued little Blaise, sitting down beside him.

Just then Joséphine opened the door of the nursery, and said that Madame la Comtesse was come in, as Mademoiselle had wanted to know, and could see Mademoiselle now in the morning-room.

III

Beautiful Diane, still wrapped in her furs, stood before the fire, looking down into it, and did not even turn when Nicole opened the door.

"Is that you, Mouse? Oh, I am so cold! Will it ever again be summer? You wanted to see me, Mouse?"

"It is about a letter," said Cousin Mouse, closing the door behind her and coming across the room. "Diane, it is about a letter." She stopped.

Nicole was a year older than Diane, but she seemed younger, because she was so small and

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shy. She had always been particularly shy before the beautiful wife of the cousin with whom she had been brought up. She had spent months at a time with Blaise and Diane after their marriage, in the Paris apartment, and together at Fontaine-les-Ardennes, with his father and mother, who had adopted her, a baby, when her own parents died, and through these years of the war she had been living almost constantly with Diane, but she had never conquered that shyness.

She stood half-way across the room and said, "I have a letter from Blaise."

Diane swung quickly around, her face alight. "Oh, how nice! I was hoping we should hear. A real letter? Not just a post-card? Let me see it!" She held out both hands and said, "Quick, Mouse."

"No," said Nicole.

Diane flushed scarlet, for an instant, angry. Then she thought. "But she does not know I care; she has not the least idea that I care."

She turned back to a big chair by the fire, laughing softly. Little Mouse, she was thinking, poor Mouse! She wanted her letter quite to herself, of course. She always had adored him, and he had always been so sweet to her. It had been sweet of him to write to her, it gave her so

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much pleasure. Diane felt suddenly very gentle toward the little cousin, who so dearly loved Blaise. She threw herself down into the deep chair, leaning back, her furs still around her, her hands both in her big silver-fox muff on her knees. "Come, sit down, Mouse, and tell me at least a little bit of it."

Nicole came over to her by the fire. She did not sit down, but just stood there, not speaking.

Diane questioned her from the depth of the cushions, "Is he well? Does his letter sound not too unhappy? He would surely tell you, you and he were always such chums, he would tell you things he would tell to no one else. You seemed to always take care of him, though you were such a little girl and he such a big boy. You always did things for him. If there was anything the matter he always wanted you. Does he say if he has warm things? Is the cold dreadful there? Does he get the packages?"

"He does not speak of the packages."

"Oh, Nicole! Then he does not get them, and what can we do? Does he seem to get our letters? Does he speak of getting my letters?"

"No, not of any letters."

Diane put up her muff as if to shade her eyes

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from the firelight, and for a long minute neither she nor Nicole spoke.

The room was very still; no sound came from the street outside, there were just the little sounds of the clock and the fire. Diane was thinking, "If only he gets my letters! If only he knows how it is all changed, life, my understanding of life, my understanding of him, and how I want to begin again, all differently." It seemed strange to her that she was not crying her thoughts out aloud, that Mouse did not hear them. She would not have minded her knowing. Suddenly she wanted her to know. For Mouse loved him too, and understood him as no one else did, and could counsel and comfort her. She wanted to tell Mouse, "Now I have come to love him, away from him. Thinking and dreaming, I have come to love him." She wanted to say to Mouse, "He will want me to love him, won't he? He will love me too, when he finds me loving him so, won't he?" She looked up to speak, and saw the girl's face.

Nicole seemed to have grown taller. She stood with her head thrown back, the shadows behind her, the firelight upon her. Her arms hung straight at her sides, her hands perfectly still, very white against her dark dress. Her face

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was very pale and her eyes very big and dark and shining. They shone as if a star were lighted in her soul. It was not with happiness that her eyes were shining, but with the high exaltation of tragedy.

"Nicole, Nicole!"

"I have got all my papers," said Nicole, "the letter came just after you went out, before two o'clock. I went to the Ministère. Dorchand gave me a letter for the Swiss Consul. It is all done. I have my place in the train, to-night, at 9:40. I will wait there, at Berne, for him. I must be there, I must, when he comes."

"Nicole, what do you mean?"

"He is to be sent to Switzerland with the next convoy."

Diane was standing up. She had flung aside the cushions, her furs, the muff, and she came forward swiftly. "Nicole, why didn't he tell me? How has it happened? Is he really coming?"

It was wonderful, all her hope. But she was frightened. She stood bewildered, frightened by the strange new high white shining of Nicole. It put out all other lights and happinesses.

"But it is I who must go, Nicole. I will take your papers and the place in the train."

"No," said Nicole, very far away and above

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her, "he wants no one but me. That is why he wrote to me. I was to tell you. He wants me, and no one else. I am to go and stay with him and take care of him. He says you must not come."

"He says I must not come? He does not want me? Nicole, he does not want me?"

"No," said Nicole.

She had wondered how she was to tell Diane, but now she did not care at all how she told her, what could it matter? She was not cruel, only nothing mattered. There was nothing that could matter anywhere: there was just that one single thing in all the world.

"He does not want me," Diane kept repeating, "he does not want me?"

"No," said Nicole.

Diane shrank back from her as if the small word were a blow. The word struck her; she shrank back, out of the firelight. She leaned against the wall, and heard her own hard breathing, and saw little Cousin Mouse standing tragic and radiant.

"It is only me he wants," said Cousin Mouse, "he says there is no one else he can bear to have near him, only me, because he is used to me, to my just being there, and loving him. He does not mind my seeing him so ill, he knows that

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I can love him through anything. There is no hope; that is why they are sending him back. It is from the time he was so long in the river, and his old wound in the lungs. It is the swift consumption, the kind in English they call 'galloping.' He says it is already almost at the end. He can live a short time, perhaps, just in the high mountains. They send them to those places. And they let some one come, when it is like that. And he wants me." She stopped, and then she said again, "He wants me."

She lifted her head high, high above everything in all the world, and said, "If he were going to be well, to live on, he might want—I don't know whom —somebody beautiful, somebody brilliant. But when he is going to die, he wants me."

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ODETTE IN PINK TAFFETA

ODETTE'S mother sat and looked at her. Nothing ever was lovelier to look at than Odette. Paul's mother was coming to dine, bringing little Claire, and there would be the General de Joncels, and Antoine de Carnac, and Odette had put on her new dress.

The world had grown to be so sad a place that Odette's mother was almost afraid of the pink taffeta dress. It looked so happy and so young. She had thought, when she got it for Odette, would the child ever wear it? Would not just her wearing such a gay little dress, tempt mourning down upon them?

Odette was arranging masses of roses in the blue old Sèvres bowl on the piano against the window. All the green dusks of the garden and the blues of the Paris roofs and chimneys were behind her, under the sunset.

Her mother wished that Paul's mother were already come, to see with her the loveliness of

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Odette, just like that. She wished, with all her heart, that Paul were there.

His mother and she had been intimate friends all their lives. Their people always had been intimate, there had been marriages in several generations between the Montmeyrans and the Wavignies. In the world of the Grand Monarch an Odette de Wavignie had waited faithfully years through in the Picardy château for her Paul de Montmeyran to come home from the king's wars.

Now another Paul was away at war, and for him, and for this little Odette there was dreamed a beautiful dream. Her mother did not know whether or not the dream were Odette's too. It was the boy's, he had cherished it in his heart through all these nearly three years of war.

He had enlisted at the beginning, when he was just eighteen. Before he went away then he had told his mother that he had loved Odette ever since he could remember, and that he could not imagine any life possible without her.

There had been nothing to be done about it, he and Odette were both such babies. She had been barely sixteen then. And what could be definitely arranged in such dreadful times? There was nothing to do but wait. The two mothers

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dreamed their dream together. And Paul had kept his dream with him while he went a charmed way that seemed unbelievable in all the horror. Some indefinable quality about him made all brilliant wonderful things come to him, lucky chance on lucky chance. It was like him to be an aviator; you thought of him always in sunshine, mounting. He came back for each leave to Odette with glories he was half ashamed of.

But what it really meant to the girl, her mother did not know. Close as they were together in their love of one another, there remained always certain uncrossed spaces between them. About certain deep things each left the other unquestioned. Odette's wide clear eyes must have seen in her father and mother's life together much of which she did not speak. As she grew older, more and more able to understand, her mother had dreaded that she might speak, but she never did; and so, giving her silence back, her mother left untouched the things words might have marred. Only sometimes she wished she were a little nearer to the child. She wished it very much to-night.

"There," said Odette, drawing back from the roses, "like that they are perfect, are they not, Maman?"

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Her mother did not answer at once, the fear that was gathering about her made it difficult for her to speak. She was thinking, it was a dark shadow, "the shadow cast before——" Odette had asked her about the roses. She answered, "Yes, dearest, like that they are perfect."

Then the door was flung open, and in came Fafa with a rush. "Maman, I'm so sorry—oh, they aren't come yet! Good, I thought I was late. It took me ages to get clean, but now I'm awfully clean, you see." His round brown head was brushed very smooth, and his round bright rosy face scrubbed very shiny.

"I thought they'd all be here," he said, standing with his hands in his pockets, in the middle of the room. "Why, look at Odette! Isn't she splendid to-night! She ought to be going to a ball! If only we had old Toto here, he'd play us a tango, and I'd dance with her. You remember, Odette, how every night, always, he played for us, here in the salon, if there were nobody, after tea, when I got through my lessons?" Old Toto was his own particular name for the tutor, who had been twenty-five at most when he went away with all the others to the war. "You remember, Odette? I say, hadn't we fun, we three together?"

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Then Alice de Montmeyran came, with little Claire.

"How are you all? Such luck, we found a taxi just at the corner of the Rue de Bellechasse. Oh! that is Odette's dress from my little dressmaker? What a darling!"

Paul's mother and Odette's mother kissed one another, like the convent girls they had been together. About them both, Paul's slight little mother and the stately tall mother of Odette, there remained always something untouched of the world. One could see how both of them would dream good dreams.

Alice de Montmeyran was still beautiful, rather inclined to amuse herself by outshining younger women. She still could take whatever she wanted of life; people told tales of her that very likely were true. But, whatever she had chosen for herself, the things she wanted for the people she loved were beautiful things, and she dreamed for her son as high and clear and pure a dream as though she had never thrown away an illusion.

Denise, Odette's mother, had treasured illusions out of desperate need of them. As a sort of fetish in much unhappiness, she had treasured her own dream of happiness for her daughter, saving, to give to her daughter, the dream that for herself had never come true.

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Odette in her rose dress, curtsied to Paul's mother.

His mother took her hands and swung them out, holding her so, pushed back, to look at her.

Claire and Fafa, aged thirteen and fourteen, blond and brown, rivals and enemies in numberless important affairs of their own, greeted one another with extreme politeness.

"Good evening, Fafa."

"Good evening, Claire."

The General came in, always quite the same; a man of the world first, a soldier after, you would have said, seeing him there without knowing what his record was in the war. A perfect type of the old "nobility of the sword," he had the courtliness in his service of the tricolour that had been his forefathers' in their service of the kings. It was easier to picture him riding to battle with plumes and silver spurs, than in this war's ugliness. But he had been in the thick of it, all along, one of those men the world most depended on. In Paris for a few days, back from all that, you would have thought something of it must be evident about him, but he was only a little more glad than ever to see them, Alice and Denise. It was half a year since he had been in Paris. And how the children had grown! Odette was just the age to be teased delightfully.

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Antoine de Carnac came, late because he had been kept at the Ministry. It was odd how the war had changed him, that had not changed the General. He was only Paul's age, but his cross clever ugly face, worn and sharp, had grown almost old in the three years. He had always been very lame, and now he stooped till he seemed hunchbacked. A wit, people called him, he had never had many kind words for anything or anybody, but now he seemed to have no word at all that was not a sneer.

Standing before Odette he appeared shorter than she. She had almost to look down on him while he talked to her.

The old butler came to the door to say that Madame la Comtesse was served.

Fafa sat at the foot of the table, in the place his father rarely troubled to occupy.

The four long windows of the dining-room were open to the garden, where the sunset still lingered. The table, small in the big room that had known so much pleasure, was drawn close to the windows.

Odette's mother talked with the others, but all the time, as she talked, she was waiting for something. She was listening, through the others' voices and her own voice, for a sound, she did not know what sound. She wanted to say to the others,

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"Hush! I must listen. Something is going to happen."

She did not know whether the minutes went by very slowly, or very fast. The lights changed in the garden. The thrushes sang, and sang, and then stopped singing. The swallows never ceased in their flight, up and down the sunset, and then up and down the twilight.

When the tops of the trees were lost in the dark above the dark garden, there came the sound she had been listening for. It was only the opening and closing of a door outside in the hall, and steps across the hall as far as the table where letters were put; then the steps going back, and the door opening and closing again.

In the midst of what she was saying, she stopped and asked old Martin to bring in the letters.

She wondered if Paul's mother were afraid too. Paul's mother had been laughing at something, but she stopped laughing. The two women looked at one another, and were afraid with the same fear.

There was a military letter. Odette's mother felt her heart stand quite still. The writing was strange to her. The name in the corner was strange, Lieutenant something, some regiment of infantry. Surely it could have nothing to do with Paul. Yet her hand shook so that she could scarcely

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tear open the envelope. Then a sense of utter relief. "Oh!" she cried, "it is that poor little tutor of Fafa's, who has been killed!"

Her eyes went again, with something now that was almost joy in them, to meet Paul's mother's eyes.

Then she thought—all the same it was sad, poor little old Toto. Aloud she said, "His lieutenant writes to me because, poor boy, he had no people of his own, to tell me that he was killed, reconnoitring, the night of the 21st—that's a week ago—by a mine explosion, buried, they never could get to him." She was thinking—such a good-looking, clever, really charming boy. She went on aloud, "The lieutenant writes, he was one of those everyday heroes to whom should be the greatest glory." She put down the letter. "It is dreadfully sad," she said, "we were all so fond of him. He was quite like one of ourselves. Fafa adored him."

Only then she realized that it must be a great shock to Fafa. In her own relief she had not thought of that. She looked at him now, at the end of the table.

Fafa was standing up, his chair pushed back. Before she could speak to him he had flung himself about, and was out of the room.

How dreadful of her, she thought, to have read

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it out so. For herself nothing had mattered but that the fear was not come true for Odette. "Poor Fafa," she said, rising, "I must go to him. He'll feel it dreadfully. He was devoted to that boy. You will all forgive me, won't you? Odette will take care of you. I leave everybody to you, Odette."

Fafa was in the room where he had used to do lessons with his old Toto. He sat by their table, his arms stretched out across it, his brown head down between them, his face hidden.

His mother went to him, and sat down on the arm of his chair, drawing him to her. He nestled against her, silent for a while, and there they talked together of the friend who was dead.

There came a knock at the door, and Claire's voice begging, "Please, Fafa, may I come in?"

She came over to him, and stood by him at the table. "Fafa, I'm so sorry. I will give you my trench-ring he made for me, and the Verdun paper-knife, because it was you he liked best. Please, let me stay with you."

"He liked you too, ever so much," said Fafa, "though you are only a girl. He said he did, often. You can stay if you like."

Claire scrambled up on top of the table and sat there, her long black silk legs dangling. "You know those two letters he wrote me? You may

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have them to keep. You may keep them for ever and ever. And now I will even tell you the secret he taught me about the trick with the two packs of cards."

Then Odette's mother, going back to the others, found they had finished dining and were all again in the salon. Odette was pouring out the coffee. The sunset was over, and the lamps were lighted.

Odette said, "Will you take coffee, Maman?"

Her mother turned to her sharply from something she had been saying to Paul's mother. It was not Odette's voice at all that said, so quietly, "Will you take coffee?" It was not Odette's face that was lifted to hers, so calm in the lamp light. "Odette dear, aren't you well?"

"Why yes, Maman."

But it was not any more her little rose pink girl. It was a white still cold girl, whom she did not know. Something had happened. What could have happened? She wanted to cry out, "What is it, oh what is it?" But then, suddenly, she knew.

She said, "Yes, coffee and no sugar."

Odette, her little Odette, whom she had thought she understood, whom she had thought she could save always from sorrow, whose life she had thought she could make happy—and all along there had been this.

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This was what he had meant to the child, he, the tutor, Fafa's little old Toto, who had been quite one of themselves, who had laughed across the table with Odette every day, who had tramped the woods with her and Fafa and "Miss," made up their four at tennis, worked for Odette in her garden beds, mounted her on her tall hunter, ridden with her and Fafa, played Tangos for them to dance.

This was the thing she had felt coming.

The new strange voice of Odette was saying to her, "Maman, the General always takes green Chartreuse, and they have forgotten it."

It was a proud Odette warning her off the uncrossed spaces. No one must come near.

The clock on the mantel struck ten. In less than an hour they would be gone, and she would be left alone with Odette.

The General was saying, "I have always felt bitterly about that boy's father, that such a man could live and die, and no thanks be rendered to him. He was never appreciated, except perhaps by one or two of the men who worked with him, and by the poor in the hospitals, and a friend here and there, like me, who happened to know." He was standing by the little table of coffee and liqueurs, moving things about on it, in a vague way, with his fine hands, that were so quiet usually.

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"These everyday heroes——" he began, and stopped.

Odette never turned her face away from the light.

"Poor boy," said the General.

Carnac came from where he had been standing rather apart from the others. He held himself straighter than usual, and seemed scarcely to limp as he walked. He said, "There is no need to pity him." He had many words as a rule, but now he seemed to be searching for words. "For me," he said, after a minute, "I envy him."

Paul's mother said, "But how sad that he should have no people of his own. There is really no one but little Fafa. It is dreadful for Fafa."

Odette said, "Fafa will forget." She said it like some one grown quite old.

How odd the others did not know. There had been a little rose pink Odette, and she was gone. There was a stranger come. And even Paul's mother did not know.

They all went on talking. Paul's mother kept Odette beside her on the sofa, by the piano and the bowl of roses. She kept drawing the girl into their talk, and Odette talked easily, but her face grew whiter and whiter.

The hands of the clock moved on over the gold

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sun and moon and world, quarter-hour, half-hour, three-quarters.

"Dear me," said Alice, "Claire ought to have been in bed ages ago; how demoralized we are all becoming! I think it must be because of Odette's new dress."

They sent for Claire to come down from the school-room. Fafa did not come with her. She had been crying, her little chin was uncertain yet, and her eyes were like wet blue flowers.

Odette kissed her good night, and it was not any more just as one child kisses another. It was with a sort of gratitude, as if she were grateful for the little girl's tears, having none of her own.

Paul's mother kissed Odette, and told her again what a darling she was in the pink taffeta dress. The General and Carnac kissed her hand, as if she had been grown up.

And then they were all gone.

"Odette, Odette!" she wanted to put her arms about the girl, as she had about little Fafa.

Odette did not look at her. She said, "I can't go to bed just yet, Maman."

She went to the piano and began moving back things that were on top of it, the bowl of roses, the photograph of Paul in his aviator's uniform. "Do you mind, Maman dear, just staying, and our

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not talking? I'd like you to stay, if you aren't sleepy."

She opened the piano and sat down before it. The light of the lamp upon it made a radiance around her, and the rose pink taffeta dress.

Her mother moved away out of the lamplight and sat still in a shadowed corner.

Odette began to play.

And her mother sat and listened, with nothing else but that she could do for her. She could not touch her, or speak to her, or even look at her. She could only listen, while she played, over and over again, the Tango that the tutor no one had thought of used to play, for her and her small brother's dancing.

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THEIR PLACES

I

I CAME out from a doorway in the Boulevard de Strasbourg, near the Gare de l'Est. It was a very hot afternoon. The shade of the chestnut trees was grateful in the crowded, dusty boulevard.

On a bench, in the shade, a soldier was lounging uncomfortably, in his hot, long infantry coat, that had once been blue, his heavy dusty boots thrust out in front of him, his arms sprawled along the back of the bench, his head sunk forward from down between his hunched shoulders. He had taken off his battered helmet, and it lay with his knapsack and rolled blanket on the ground at his feet. His hair was quite grey. He seemed so forlorn and alone that I spoke to him.

"Something wrong?"

He looked up; his face was sunburnt to the colour of yellow leather. He had a rough small

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grey beard, and black eyes under rough grey eyebrows.

"What would you?" he said.

I thought I recognized the accent. I looked at his knapsack and things and questioned, "You are come on leave?"

He jerked his head back towards the station, answering, "I arrived an hour ago."

"But," I said, "leave is not meant for sitting drearily alone, it is for family, and friends, and things to do."

He repeated, "What would you? I am not of Paris. I have no one here, and nothing to do."

"You are just waiting between trains," I asked, "on your way home?"

He said, "It is of no use my going home."

"But your people, have you no people?"

"Oh, yes, my wife and the little boys."

"And you do not go to them?"

"No use."

He was staring straight in front of him.

I waited, not wanting to say too much, and not wanting to leave him.

After a minute he picked up his arms from along the back of the bench, drew in his legs and leaned forward, with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. Then I sat down on the bench beside him.

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"Please, tell me, where is your home? Is it in the High Provence?"

"Yes," he said. "In the mountains. Between Barrême and Senez, at Ourjas, you know."

II

I COULD see and feel that country, ancient and very strange, all the colour of wild beasts. The wide bare stony beds of rivers, and the great bare stretches of mountain are the colour of lions' shoulders. The yellow greys of wild thyme and lavender and olive are tawny and warm, the colour of lions' breasts. The cypresses are black, long straight markings, like the stripes in the skins of tigers. All the little poor stone houses, and the ruins of watchtowers and castles are of tawny live wild colours, like the rocks and the rare patches of corn and vine. Tawny oxen drag the plough, or stand with the cart in the vineyard. The sheep and the sheep-dogs are tawny together under the olives.

There is a certain little stone house, square, with three cypress trees beside it, set back, up a rough path, from the road, among olives and vines.

The sheep were going home to it in one twilight when I passed, a large flock, managed by a very busy dog. There were two or three lambs with the

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flock. The shepherd was a very small boy. He was carrying one of the lambs over his shoulder, its feeble legs crossed under his chin, its long face nodding beside his brown round face. He was toiling up the steep path; even the tiny autumn lamb was heavy for him.

It was September, the grape-vines were yellow. A woman and two boys yet smaller than the shepherd were working in the vines at some distance from the path. They were spraying the vines with sulphur against the phylloxera. The woman stood up and turned to wave her yellow stained hands at the little shepherd; one of the boys threw down the sulphur bellows and came running to him.

The mountain farm was not the home of the soldier, with whom I sat on the bench in the Boulevard de Strasbourg, nor the woman in the vines his wife, nor the little boys his. Only it was the place, and they were the people, I kept thinking of while he talked.

III

For the first eleven months of the war he had had no leave. In those eleven months he had written four times to his wife. He had got the sergeant to help him with the letters, because he himself

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could not write very well. The sergeant knew what to say in letters, all those fine phrases to begin and end with.

Mélanie, his wife, had written to him eight times. She had had good schooling, and she herself knew several fine phrases about the health of every one. Her letters were just like the sergeant's. Michel was very proud of the letters, and always showed them to the "copains." He thought letters wonderful things. But it never seemed that Mélanie's letters had anything at all to do with Mélanie. The phrases, that were so fine, about healths, brought her and the little boys no nearer to the man in the Argonne; they brought to him, there in the trenches, nothing whatever of his home. And how, in all the world, could any thought, any feeling of his, any sense of the thing, and of his part in it, have been given by his poor fine phrases, or the sergeant's, to the woman who knew nothing, nothing at all, beyond the sheepfold and the olive pastures and the hill-side of vines?

There were eleven months from the August day when Michel and the others were shepherded down the dusty yellow road, away out of all that they had ever known, to the July day when he tramped the dusty yellow road back again, come home for six days' leave, the journey's three days each way not counting. The eleven months had been so

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crowded with confusion and helplessness and horror, so deadened with fatigue, that there seemed to be left of them nothing he could understand and tell. The eleven months were a wide, wide gap. He had nothing with which to fill in the gap.

And Mélanie too had nothing with which to fill it in. All her life she had worked in vineyard and sheepfold. She had trained and trimmed and watered the vines, minded their illnesses, and defended them from their enemies. She had taken the sheep out to pasture, and watched the nights with the ewes. She had washed the linen of her parents and little sisters and brothers, and then of her husband and her children, in river-water, pounding it out on gleaming stones, and spreading it along the wild herbs to dry in the sun. She had made the soup in the great iron pot of her father's house, and then in the great iron pot of her husband's house.

When her husband had been swept away, with all the men and horses and mules, to the war, she had had to go on doing these things, with only the small boys to help her.

She and her husband had always worked together, but they had never talked together.

There had been no one to explain to her and the three little boys what it meant that Michel

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was away at the war. There was no one who even knew that the man who came back to them, with a rough beard, in a blue uniform, was a hero, with thousands of others. They stood about and looked at him, as if he were a stranger there among them. They had nothing to say to him, and he had nothing to say to them.

He had nothing to say to Mélanie, once he had asked her how she had got through the vintage, had she had a bad time with the lambs, had the yoke of young oxen worked well.

To all these questions she answered: "Well enough."

She questioned him about the war, what was it like, what was it for, when would it be over? And he did not know how to answer.

In July there was not much work. And anyway, in six days, what could he have done?

He slept a great deal. When he half waked between doses on the bench at the door, he sometimes found Mélanie standing in the doorway, staring at him in vague wonder. He ate a great deal. Mélanie cooked meat for him every day. The little boys stared at him while he ate it. The last day he remembered that they had never seen meat before, except on Sundays.

He said to Mélanie then, "It must cost very much."

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She said, "Never mind," so he had known he was a guest in his own old place.

There was another thing he had come to understand; he and Mélanie understood it very well together. She could manage for herself and the little boys. But if there were to be another child, if she were to be ill and unable to work, in need of help, through months and months, while the farm went to waste and ruin; and, after that, with another little body to clothe, to feed, to tend, while the sheep needed tending, and the vines and the bits of field—well then, there would be an end of it. It seemed as if indeed there were nothing left.

"Better let me get the oxen past there," said Beppe, the oldest boy, to him; "they are always afraid of crossing the torrent, you see, father, and they are accustomed to me."

The second boy explained that the sheep did better in the hill pasture this year, it was less burnt than the pastures by the river.

The youngest boy said, "You don't know, father, but we have not enough wine this year to drink as you drink it, only enough to soak our bread in."

On the sixth day, Michel went down the dusty yellow road once more, and back to the life of which this life knew nothing.

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His next full leave came in eight months, in April.

He had had one leave between of forty-eight hours; he had gone only to a town behind the lines, where he was then, in Champagne. He had been with a crowd of the "copains" there, and it was a big town with cafés and a cinema.

His regiment was before Verdun through all the defence. It was from the trenches before Verdun that he went home for a second leave.

He seemed to have come back from farther away even than before; it was as if ages had passed since he had had anything to do with these people of another life. They had grown yet far more strange to him.

April was the time of the heaviest work on the farm. The work had changed. Last autumn Mélanie had sold the yoke of oxen for a price Michel had never dreamt of. She told him that oxen brought a very high price now because of the war. A man had come from Barrême and bought all the oxen in the countryside. She and Beppe were to go in to Barrême to the market these days and buy two yokes of young oxen to break in and resell. She said that managing so, they would have the use of two teams for the spring ploughing, the oxen cost nothing to feed in summer, and could be sold at a gain at the moment of the vintage. She

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had arranged with a vine-grower of Barrême to take all her autumn vintage. He had sent up a man to teach her and Beppe some new treatment of the young vines. The two smaller boys had worked all winter at Senez for the old carpenter, and now he was to come up and help them with the sheep-shearing and with getting down the sheep and lambs to market.

The day Michel left to go back to the trenches before Verdun, was the day of the yearly cattle-market at Barrême. Mélanie had to go in and take Beppe with her. They had to start long before dawn.

In the darkness Michel waked to hear her groping about the room where they slept over the sheep. She had not lit the candle, but was trying to dress in the dark. He knew it was for fear of waking him. The sheep were not yet stirring, in their pen underneath the room. He did not call out that he was awake. He lay there quite still, thinking, "I may be going back to be killed. Every one else is killed, and probably I shall be killed and she does not think of it at all. She is going to Barrême to the cattle-market. She thinks of the two yokes of young oxen she is going to buy."

He heard Beppe in the next room, getting ready also.

"And Beppe does not think of it," pon-

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dered the man, "he does not think of anything except the oxen."

He was going to speak to Mélanie in the darkness. Then he decided, "It is better that she does not know. She has got to think about the oxen. If she must think about the oxen it is better she does not know of men being killed. She could not have her head clear to judge of the oxen, and bargain for them, if she were thinking that her man was going away to be killed."

He lay, expecting to hear her move to the door, to open it, and go. But when he thought she was at the door she came back, and came close to the bed, and stood beside it. He felt her standing there, looking down at him in the darkness of the room.

After a moment she said, "You are awake, Michel?"

"Yes."

"I must be off."

"I know."

"I wish you could have seen the oxen."

"I will be gone by noon."

"I have left you the soup to warm over, and some cold meat and cheese." She stooped and kissed him.

"You have to work very hard, Mélanie," he said, and kissed her in the dark.

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He listened to her going.

At the door she hesitated, standing for a moment, and said again, "I wish you could have stayed and seen the oxen."

He heard Beppe clumping down the stairs after her, and then the opening and shutting of the door, and their steps on the path.

He lay there a long time. After a while he heard a nightingale singing in the dark; and then all the nightingales of the countryside began to sing. After a while the old red cock waked, and called up all the day-birds with his crowing. All the birds of the day began their chatter, and the nightingales stopped singing.

Michel heard the sheep stirring and beginning to bleat, in their pen under his room. It was light then. He heard one of the small boys open the door of the sheep-pen and call to the sheep. Then he heard them all troop out into the morning.

When he left at noon, both little boys were off at the ploughing. There were some almond trees in the fields, and they were in flower, drifts of rose-colour against all the wild beast colour of the overturned earth. The tawny house was empty in the noon stillness when Michel went out of it, going back to the war.

Michel's regiment was terribly cut up before Verdun. Leave came round more quickly because

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so few were left to have their turn of it. He had leave in the autumn, but he did not go home. He went to a town behind the lines where he was then, in the Somme. It was full of "copains," as had been the town behind the lines in Champagne, and there was a cinema, and there were many cafés.

People in that town all talked about Paris.

His next leave he took in Paris.

IV

THE soldier on the bench sat with his elbows on his knees, and his head in his hands, and told me many things.

"So you see," he said at the end, "of what use is it?"

I tried to explain to him, but he scarcely listened. He sat up straight and looked about him while I talked.

"There are many people," he said.

The boulevard was full of soldiers on leave.

He said, "The train coming was so crowded with all of us, that there was no room in the wagons. We hung on to the platforms, and the steps of the wagons, and some climbed up on to the roofs. Two boys were thrown from the roof of a wagon, and both of them killed."

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"Oh!" I said. "Oh, how horrible! Just when they were coming on leave."

"Yes," he said after me, "just when they were coming on leave."

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THE SECOND HAY

I

LISE thought it was only the storm, come up again, trying to get in at the old strong door. She did not stir from where she sat, by the cradle shaped like a boat. Little Pierre was sleeping well. The candle on the chimney-shelf was burnt low down; it must be nearly dawn. But Fino in the courtyard was barking frantically. Then she realized that some one was calling. Some one was calling her name, "Lise, Lise!" And it was Yvon's voice. She was across the wide room, and had tugged at the bolts, and the door was open.

From the dusk of dawn outside all the hot rainy wind gushed into the room, and the candle was blown out. She and Yvon could not see one another as they stood together when he had got the door shut. She heard the wet thud of his bundle where he threw it down on the tiles.

She heard little Pierre again moaning. "Thou

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hast wakened him," she said to her husband, whispering. It was the first word she had for him, coming home, after nearly two years, from those far strange countries, and those strange terrible things of war. "He has been so ill, and thou hast wakened him."

"What a storm," Yvon was saying. "I have had to walk from Bayeux. Light the candle."

She heard him move, near her, in the dark. She whispered to him, "Wait, thou wilt hurt thyself, the table, things are in other places than when thou wast here." She felt her way past the table, along the wall, past the oak bench. "I have had to change things," she said, whispering in the dark. "Our bed is moved in here, under the stairs, that thy father and mother may have the back room. There is Pierre's cradle beside the bed. He has been very ill. I have had to have the doctor come many times from Angerville."

She found the matches on the corner of the chimney-shelf, and struck one against the stone of the chimney-shelf, and the blue flame spurted up. She relit the candle, and carried it to the table, sheltering it with her hand.

"We have no more oil for lamps," she said, always whispering.

She went to the cradle, where the baby was stirring and crying a little. Through all the weeks

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and months of war, from his one leave to the next, through all the days of work and the nights of anxiety, she had longed and longed for her husband's home-coming. And now his coming had wakened the sick child. Countless times she had imagined showing him the child that had been born after he was sent out, in the second winter of the war, to Salonica. And this was how she showed the child to him, almost with impatience and anger against him.

He came over to her by the cradle. "Lise, will he die?"

"Hush! He is getting well, but he must sleep."

He stood beside her, afraid to move or speak even after the child had stopped crying and was quiet again. The huge black shadows of the man and woman stayed quite motionless before them, across the cradle and the bed, and upon the white-plastered wall, until at last she said, always whispering, "It is well," and turned to him. "Yvon, oh Yvon, thou art come!"

At last she could look at him. His uniform was stained out of all resemblance to blue, and hung like a sack upon him, he was become so thin. "Thou art drenched, a thousand times through and through!"

They moved together towards the dark hearth.

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"It is now ten days he has been ill. Yvon, so much has happened. Oh Yvon, if only thou art come in time to get in the hay. Dost thou think this storm will have ruined the hay?" Her whispering of the words gave them a curious intensity. She had longed all the time for his arms about her; but now she only thought, "What if he has come too late to save the hay?"

He said, "I am cold."

The fire was banked under with ashes.

She only stood looking down at it.

He stooped, and with the hearth-shovel scraped the ashes away from what was left alive of the embers underneath. There was wood piled in the angle of wall and chimney. He threw pine cones and twigs and logs on the embers, that flared up. The firelight leaped to the black rafters, and set all the room's shadows dancing.

"Give me something hot to drink, Lise." He pulled a stool from underneath the table, over close to the logs. "Hast thou brandy?"

"Very little, I must keep it against illness. I will heat thee some soup."

There was soup left in the pot, set on one side of the hearth. She scooped some of it out with the ladle, and put it into a saucepan, and set it on a heap of embers, apart from the logs. "If we can get in the hay," she said, "then I will be

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able to pay Maguet. It is only of lard and carrots, we have no meat any more." She knelt before the hearth, to watch her saucepan.

"Lise, how thin thou art grown! And thou art no more straight, like the little white birch tree. And thy skin used to be like hawthorn flowers."

"I have worked hard," she said. "Michel and Yvonnette are still so small, and thy father and mother are too old to really help. Again this year we could not get the crops in. If only we can save the second hay. Take thy wet things off, Yvon. Everything of thine is in the old chest, by the door. I had to make room in the cupboard for the things of thy father and mother."

He said, "Why are my father and mother here?"

"It was last winter, I wrote thee of it."

"I never got the letter. Letters too, you know, are drowned. Why did my father and mother come here? Why did they leave the farm at the cross-roads?"

"They could not keep the farm going without thy brother. Two old people alone, what could they do? The neighbour, Maguet, said he would help them. He is a bad man, Yvon."

"What did he do?"

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"I do not know. They themselves do not know. Thy father has been so ill. He was ill always, from the day word came that thy brother was killed. That winter after thou didst go out was terrible, and then the summer when little Pierre was born, all the illness. Thy father is very changed, Yvon. He was not able to understand, and I have never really known how it came to such a pass. When they had to sell everything at auction, it was Maguet who got the money." She stood up, and went and fetched a bowl from the oak dresser, between the windows. She took the saucepan from the hearth and poured the soup into the bowl. "Eat it while it is hot, Yvon. The old people came here. What else was there?"

He took the bowl from her and drank. Then he said, "Name of God!" quite softly to himself, not as if it were an ugly oath, but as if it were the one thing in all the world to say.

"There is so much work," Lise went on, "work, and work, and work, that I cannot get done."

He drank again from the bowl of soup, and then said, a second time, "Name of God," always quietly.

His big worn-out muddy boots steamed with wet, where they were thrust out before him to

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the heat of the fire. His long infantry coat steamed with wet also, as he had thrown it open from his shirt, that was torn at the throat. He had not thought to take off his helmet, only pushed it back from his rough young blond hair. It was odd how young his hair looked, curly and bright, when his face was grey with fatigue. Perhaps it was because of his hair that he seemed younger than Lise.

"Last winter," she said, standing in the firelight, "I had to have Maguet mend the roof of the barn. It had to be done, Yvon, and there was no one else but he. I kept thinking thou wouldst come home. I thought thou wouldst be here for the ploughing and sowing. And then I thought it would be in time for the first hay, and the harvest. I thought we could save things, and pay him, when thou didst come. Wilt thou that I heat thee more soup? There is a little yet left in the pot."

He shook his head heavily and put the emptied bowl down beside him on the floor.

The candle was burnt quite out, and only the fire was lighting the room. The two windows showed oblongs of that dawn pallor which is not light.

Lise went over to one of the windows, and stood looking out. "The rain has stopped," she said.

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"Perhaps it is not yet too late." She went to the door and threw it open impatiently.

The farm court was still full of shadow. The dog Fino flung himself in at the door and across the room to his master.

Yvon got up. "The child sleeps well," he said, always whispering. He stretched out his big arms in their sodden blue sleeves. "I am very tired," he added.

Lise said, looking out to the dawn, "Perhaps there will be good weather——"

II

This is the little story of Lise.

From some Paris slum she had been sent down, a small sick creature, perhaps five years old, belonging to nobody but the *Assistance Publique*, to be "farmed out" in Normandy. She had been sent, as it happened, to the Legeorgeu's farm, near Angerville, at the Bayeux cross-roads.

It was the summer that Legeorgeu's little girl, Suzon, died of a kick she got from a cow that the flies were bothering. She, Suzon, had been older than the little foundling, a plump, blonde Norman child, while the Paris child was thin and brown; but the farmer and his wife, in their grief, fancied

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a resemblance between the two children, and because their little girl had loved the slum-child, they also loved her. They kept her on to live at the cross-roads farm, and let her grow up with their two boys, Pierre and Yvon, and were as good to her as they were to them.

Even when Yvon married her, they were good to her—and he might have married so well. Lise had quite known what it meant that a son of the cross-roads farm should marry the farm-girl. There had been that day when he told his father and mother, and she had waited, sorely afraid, in her little room under the thatch. She never forgot his mother's coming to her there, with awkward arms, unused to caresses, held out to her.

How well she remembered, when the old people had need of her, their goodness to her when she had had need. Girls who had their own people, and homes, and names, did not know what she knew of gratitude, and so could not know love as she knew it. When love had been young for her and for Yvon, and it was the month of May, she had known happiness that came back to her through the years after, with every new blossoming of hawthorn-hedge and orchard. When their love was older, and there were the children, still it gave radiance for her to the work of fields

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and pastures, of farm-court and barn and kitchen, to washing of linen and baking of bread.

When he had gone out in those first days of the war, those awful, wonderful days, of singing and strewing of flowers, her agony had had in it something of ecstasy. The word France had meant something to her above grief, above fear. Something of glory had gone into all the new strange hard life that war had made. War had made a very difficult thing of life, but however desperate the labour, there had been then the exaltation.

He had had two leaves in that first year and a half, and each leave had been full for her, its every day and moment, of a love the more beautiful because of the tragedy, and glory.

In the second winter, before little Pierre was born, when Yvon had been sent out mercilessly far away, her thoughts still had been free and winged to follow him.

That last morning she had walked with him, as far as she could, along the Bayeux road. It had been only as far as the white birch-tree, which he had always said she looked like. She had stood there, and watched him go away. It had been a wet January morning, with the world as dark as grief. Everything had been heavy with tears. Sky and fields and road had

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been full of tears. But she had had her vision of his coming home, of her meeting him there, in some day of sunshine and blossoms, by the white birch-tree. She had stood and watched him go. He had promised not to look back. She hoped he would look back. He did look back. He stopped and turned, and saw her, and stood and waved to her, from the turn of the Bayeux road.

Long after he was gone, she had stayed there, by the white birch-tree, gazing along the empty road. Then she had gone back to wait for the day when he should come home. And now he was come.

III

"THE fields are beaten down all flat," said Lise, "but with this wind and sun, if the weather holds, the grass will be up again. We can mow, and get the hay in, surely, Yvon, now thou art here."

The sunshine poured in, long and level, through the east windows of the farm-room and the wide-open door. The duck-pond, out there, glinted in the sunshine, strewn around with white feathers. The pigeons preened shining breasts in the sunlight, along the pole and side-boards of the ancient

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farm-wagon. The drone of bees sounded busy and content and warm in the pear vines on the wall. Out beyond, again, through the high arched entrance of the farm-court, there was a fine stir of wind in the orchard over the lane. In the kitchen the coppers above the fireplace caught the sunlight, reflecting it back, and the old black table, polished by many diligent hands, shone like a mirror.

It was the moment of leisure, after the farm chores were done and before the dew was off the fields, the moment of soup, and bread and cider, benches and stools pulled up to the table, in the yet very early sunshine.

Lise had made coffee in the beaten copper pot. She was pouring it out for Yvon when she said, "If only this weather holds——"

Then she went to the cradle, where the baby was awake and making little comfortable sounds, all by himself, as he sucked his two thumbs.

"He is getting well," she told Yvon, for the hundredth time that morning.

"Thou hast eaten nothing," Yvon said to her.

She answered, "I am never hungry now," and went on restlessly moving about the kitchen, from the cradle to the hearth, and the table, and, always, to one or the other of the windows, or the door, to stand and look out at the day's

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promise. "There is so much work," she kept saying, "so much that we could not get done alone, Yvon. Now thou art here we must get it done, all of it."

Breaking bread into his soup, Yvon muttered, "Out there, men eat bread that crawls with worms." He did not know how to say that he was thinking of the harvests there had been no one to gather, at home, in those men's little patches of field.

Lise came over to stand by him at the table. "After thou wast gone, Yvon, that second winter, the roof of the barn began to leak, and the white-foot cow got cold and died."

He made no comment, and she went on. "I would not have Maguet mend the roof; I was afraid of him even then. And I was so sure that before another winter thou wouldst be coming home."

Yvon, still not speaking, reached across the table for the earthen jug of water.

Lise went back to stand in the doorway.

There was silence behind her, at the table, except that Fino, close beside his master, kept thumping the floor with a contented tail. The children, over their bowl of bread and soup, stared at their father. In nineteen months Michel and Yvonnette had almost ceased to talk of him.

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Jacques, who had been two years old when his father went out to Salonica, was rather afraid of the strange man in the kitchen. The old people, as the war went on, talked always more and more of their sons. But of Yvon they had come to talk as distantly, as vaguely, as they talked of Pierre who had been killed. Now they gazed at him, across the black table, curiously, as if wondering what his coming might mean.

He sat staring at the earthen jug of water. He was thinking about water. He said, "Out there, the water is slimy and thick and yellow and never cool." He stopped a minute. Then he said, "How good the water was, of the spring, at the old cross-roads farm."

"I remember," chimed in his mother, "the taste of that spring water, when I came, a bride, to the cross-roads farm. We shall never drink of it again, Yvon, the cross-roads spring." Her voice sounded very old. Her blue eyes had a very old look in them, though she was still alert and sturdy, with the two loops of black hair smoothed down on her forehead, sewn into the band of her close cap.

"But the next spring," said Lise from the doorway, "I had to let Maguet help with the ploughing and sowing, and for that, in return, he took the harvest."

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"He took the harvest," nodded Yvon's mother, "the harvest of thy fields, Yvon, and of thy father's fields also. Then he took the apples of the cross-roads' orchards."

"Lise," piped up the grandfather, who was bent quite over and seemed to have grown very small, "Lise, I cannot lift my bowl of soup!"

"His hands shake," said the grandmother. "He cannot lift the bowl. His hands shake because he is afraid."

"I am so afraid," whimpered the old man.

Lise, coming back from the door, explained to Yvon, "He is afraid of Maguet. But father, thou art not afraid now Yvon is here. Take thy spoon, so, like that. There, that is well." Standing by the old man, she told Yvon, "Last winter Crooked-Horn and the brown mare died, because of the cold and the wet, and after all I had to let Maguet mend the barn roof."

The grandmother broke in: "We always have to let Maguet fetch the doctor in his cart from Angerville. Since a year the diligence has been no more running. Every time we have the doctor we must pay Maguet four francs to fetch him. All last winter we had to have him for thy father. And now for little Pierre. And all the medicines. And boots for Yvonnette cost eighteen francs in Angerville."

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"Mother would not get me boots," burst forth the little girl, speaking to her father for the first time. "Mother would not get me boots. And my old ones I cannot walk in any more. I have to wear my sabots at Mass."

"These last debts," went on Lise, behind the old man's chair, "I kept thinking we could pay. But it was always that we could not get the work done. There was only the old white horse left to drag the plough. If we could but have ploughed, we might have managed the sowing."

"We lost all the first hay," said the old woman, "we could not get it in before the rain."

The old man whimpered, "Lise, Lise, take away my bowl of soup!"

"Sometimes he cries," said Yvonnette to her father.

"Yvonnette cries too," said Michel, "but I never cry. Sometimes mother does. She cries when Maguet comes and says we must pay."

The grandmother pushed her chair back. "There is only left the second hay," she said.

"Yvon has come," said Lise, "it will all be well." She turned, and went over to the cradle again.

"Out there," said Yvon, standing up with Fino from the table, "out there men fight." He looked at Lise, who was no more the erect, blos-

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som-white girl, and at the old people, the man who seemed to have grown so small, and the woman whose voice and eyes were so tired. "Out there," he said again, "men fight and fight, on and on." He could not have told them what he meant, saying that, here in his home.

Lise, bending over the cradle, said, "If little Pierre goes well like this, by the time the grass can be cut, I will leave him for father to mind, Yvon, and be out, I also, to work in the fields."

IV

Little Pierre was so quickly well that when the fields were dry he was sitting up among pillows, chuckling and cooing to Jacques, the bigger baby, playing by the cradle, and to the grandfather, left to watch the two of them.

Here is the long story of Yvon's leave.

It is a very long story, for it is the story of every minute, and every weather. It all comes down to it that the battle of those days was desperate in the fields. Always, since men had lived by them, they had been fields of battle. Generations of men had fought in those fields to get a living, wrested it from great forces, held it, defended it, against great forces.

There was sunshine, and a lifting, drying wind.

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The fields stood up. The fields could be mown. It was a fight, desperate against time. Even the dew was an enemy. The dew meant loss of time. The dew sets seal and closes. If there should come up a storm! Yvon fought against time and against storm. The lightest rain might trample. Oh, Ye Dews and Showers and Rain, Bless Ye the Lord. But for men you can be enemies and cruel. Up and down the fields, back and forth, from dawn till dusk, day after day, and day after, they had to fight against time, desperately. They got the mowing done.

But rain came before the hay was in. Oh, Ye Lightnings and Clouds, Bless Ye the Lord, Praise Him and magnify Him for ever. Then they must toss over and spread out all the wet fields, up and down, back and forth. Two women, one of them old, a little girl, a little boy, and Yvon, were so few in the wide fields, with only the old white horse left to drag the cart.

The fields were immensely wide, it seemed to Lise. And always, it seemed to her, there was menace in the skies, over the fields.

The story of those days is really a picture—wide fields, brown with stubble, brown haycocks, the half-heaped cart, the white horse, the brown dog, the peasants, brown figures in their attitudes of toil and of haste; and, over

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the edge of the fields, the sky, purple and black, with its heralded, marshalled, oncoming storm-clouds.

Work, and work, and work, Lise had said; and that was all there was of it. Yvon had said, "Out there, men fight."

They got the hay well in, and Yvon sold it for a fine price to a man in Bayeux. Another man in Bayeux bought in advance the rights of the orchards. Maguet was paid all that was owed him. Something even was left over, and, at the Autumn Fair in Bayeux, Lise would be able to buy a cow.

Yvon's last night Maguet came to the door of the kitchen, when Lise was putting the bowls of soup on the black table, that shone in candle-light and firelight.

Yvon stood up from the table, and moved towards the intruder, heavily, across the red tiles.

There stood Maguet, with his black beard, uncertain, in the doorway.

The old grandfather, at the table, piped out, in shrill laughter. "Ay, ay, who is afraid? Who is afraid now?"

Little Pierre, tumbling about on the floor, sat up and dimpled, and chuckled, because he loved strangers.

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V

THE day Yvon went back was a clear cool brilliant hard day of north wind.

The lane was full of flying leaves, under the orchards. The wind tasted of cider. Out on the edge of the hill, where the fields opened wide away to the sweep of the wind, it was hard to keep one's feet. The wind wrapped Yvonnette's long yellow hair around her eyes. The wind blew Michel's black school-cape quite over his head. Fino ran and barked in the wind. The wind sang in the telegraph wires, along the Bayeux road.

Lise and the two big children and the dog went with Yvon, a little way along the Bayeux road, not as far as the white birch-tree. They might have gone quite far; but Lise stopped, she did not know why.

Yvon said, as they stood in the wind, "Well now, and so thou canst get through till spring."

"Even," she said, "we can manage for the winter wheat at All Saints."

He stooped and kissed Yvonnette and Michel.

Lise thought then, suddenly, how strange it had been that when he was bidding his mother good-bye, and she had begun to sob piteously, he

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had said, "But no, my mother, I pray thee, I am so tired, let me go."

When he had kissed the children good-bye and turned to Lise, she remembered that, because, suddenly, she too wanted to sob. She wanted to do what in all those days she had never thought of doing, throw her arms about Yvon, and hold him tight, and sob against his shoulder.

But he would have said, "I am so tired, let me go."

"Thou wilt write," she said, for something to say, "Thou wilt always write, Yvon?"

He said, "But yes, of course I will write."

She stood with the children and Fino and watched him go away, down the Bayeux road. She thought, "Why, he is going! Where will they send him? To what will they send him? When will he come again? Will he ever come again? Yvon," she cried out, "Yvon!" but the wind brought her voice back.

She ran and ran after him. He could not hear her call, and he was walking fast. The wind blew against her, as if to try to keep her from catching him up. It was Fino who caught him up. The dog leaped about him, and he stopped and turned. It was just by the little white birch-tree.

She had run so hard she could not speak, she

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could not breathe. Beside him, she just stood there. She wanted to tell him that the dreams were not gone, the struggle had not really worn the glory off, that, behind all the hard driving on and on of necessity, there was love yet. Of all that, she could say nothing. She stood panting.

"What is it?" he said.

She said, in gasps, her hands both at her throat, "About the hay, it was for the children, the old people," she stopped, choking.

He said, "I must go, Lise. I shall miss my train in Bayeux."

She said, "Yvon, Yvon, I seemed to have forgotten everything, for just the hay!"

He stooped and kissed her, and turned, and went on. He went away, walking fast and heavily and steadily along the Bayeux road.

She stood still, by the white birch-tree. Her voice was quite dead in her throat. She could not call after him, she could not move, her body was of lead. She asked herself, at the bend of the road, would he stop and look back? That other time she had made him promise not to stop and look back. And he had stopped, and turned, and waved to her.

She stood with her two hands still at her throat, thinking of nothing but that he should turn. She

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heard the children clattering up behind her, calling through the wind to her, frightened, "Mother, Mother! thou art not going also?" But she paid no heed to them.

It seemed to her that if he did not turn, it would be because everything, everything, was lost—for just the hay. It seemed to her she would have died, as from a knife-thrust, there, by the white birch-tree, had he not turned and looked back, and stopped, for one last minute, to stand and wave to her.

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ONE OR ANOTHER

I

AFTER more than three years of it, it seemed to Charlotte that the loveliness of the country and its deep peace had become unbearable. Since the beginning of the war she had scarcely left the château. She had never been able to get away, there was so much for her to do, and to do alone. She would not for the world have had Philip know how difficult it was.

At first all the difficulties had seemed so much part of the war that she had almost been glad of them. She had felt she was somehow fighting, as Philip was, and been proud. All that she could do for the estate and the people, she had felt she was doing, not only for Philip and the children, but for France. She had been able to say to herself, "For France," fearlessly, thinking of

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Philip, there with death, day after day, dreadful night after dreadful night.

She had been able to say the words aloud in the first year, even in the second year, to people of the villages and farms, when tragedy came to them.

But too much tragedy came to them, and for too long a time, the old people and women and children, left alone with the land. There no longer seemed to be anything that one could say. And something dark and very cold had come to the days, darker and colder than the closing down of winter. Until now Charlotte had had no fear of the future, any more than Philip in the trenches with his men had fear of it. But now, at moments, she was afraid, like a child, with a panic of fear.

The day of the change of the hour, when it was dark too soon on the château stairs, she stopped half-way down, among the shadows, and thought she could not go on, that nothing could go on, that one more step, down the stairs, or on with life, would be a going quite over the edge.

The banister was cold as she leaned against it, the touch of the cold stone frightened her, as the shadows did. She knew how absurd it was. She wanted Philip to come and laugh at her. She had never, during all the war, wanted him just stupidly, brokenly, as she did in that moment on the stairs.

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A door across the hall opened, and the shadows swung back, like curtains, from the light of the lamp some one was bringing. The shadow curtains, swinging back, showed the dreariness that had taken possession of the fine old hall, the look of desolation that had come to it, during the war, with most of the rooms it led to closed and the great stone hearth empty.

The old manservant, coming across the tiles, with his slow shuffling step, did not see her there on the stairs. She thought she must speak to him, that it would break some spell, if she could speak to him. It took an effort absurdly great to just say, "The postboy has not come, Denis?" The sound of her own voice gave her courage to move, and she came down the stairs.

Old Denis set down the lamp on the table, under the antlers of that last splendid stag of Philip's. "No, Madame la Marquise, the postboy has not yet come."

"He is even more late than usual to-day," she said, at the foot of the stairs.

"That is what we also are saying, Madame la Marquise. Amélie, the porter's wife, has been three times along the road, as far as the Carelle farm. It is now twenty days since she had a letter."

She herself had had a letter eight days ago.

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Philip had been before Verdun then, as he had been during months, near the Côte du Poivre, where there was always fighting. He was one of those who had fought since the beginning, just steadily, on and on. Amélie's husband and young Denis, old Denis's marvellous grandson, had had more leaves than he.

The old man was saying, "Poor Amélie, after twenty days, without news, she frets if the postboy is an hour late." He smiled pityingly, the coming of the postboy never much concerned him, he was so sure always that all must go well for his grandson. The boy's luck, or something born in him, that made him a splendid soldier, that had raised him out of the ranks, in the three years, to the grade of first lieutenant, gave the old man a mysterious confidence for him: such a favourite of fortune was not in the least to be worried about. And to-night the postboy's coming was of no matter at all in the world, because to-night young Denis was expected home on leave. The trouble of others was only vague to old Denis in his great content. "Poor Amélie," he said, "and also at the Carelle farm they are anxious for news of Alain from the hospital. I was just coming to find Madame la Marquise, to tell her that Godart is in the steward's room waiting to know if he may have a word with her."

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"Oh Denis, that means there is more trouble! There has been more trouble in the village?"

"But yes, Madame la Marquise, something about the rents again. They will not listen to Godart, some of them threaten him."

Charlotte had come over to the table where the lamp was. The damp of the hall made a halo round the light. She remembered how there used to be, always at that season, a fire of huge logs burning on the hearth. She could see tall, slight Philip, come in wet from a long tramp somewhere, stopping a minute, with all the dogs about him, to shake himself dry, as the dogs shook themselves, in the glow of the fire. If only he would come in now, like that, and she could say to him, "I am much frightened, I have tried so hard, and it is too much for me." She knew just how the rough damp stuff of his coat would feel against her cheek. He would take her chin in his two hands, and lift her face up, and make all manner of fun of her.

"I can't see Godart now, Denis, ask him to wait." She went to the door of the small salon, the only one they used now, where the children would be waiting for her with Monsieur l'Abbé. "Say that I will see him after tea."

The small salon was big enough to be cold and dusky, except just about the fire and the lamp.

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There stood up, as Charlotte came in, from the lesson-table under the lamp, the Abbé, small and fragile, with his white hair, and the two boys of eleven and twelve. The first glance at the subdued repressed little group they made, showed her that here, too, something was wrong. Three or four dogs came to meet her, with dejected tails.

"What is the matter, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

He answered, "They will not work, Madame, they simply will not. They do not listen to a word I say. They laugh, Madame, and find it droll that I scold them." His voice shook.

Niki, the bigger boy, tried to turn laughter into a cough, but the laughter bubbled and overflowed—it was so funny that Monsieur l'Abbé should be almost ready to cry.

Guy caught the contagion of Niki's laughter, and stood too, bubbling and rippling.

"The examination papers are come, Madame," the Abbé went on, "we have only fifteen more days. There is so much we must go over. They will not pay attention. They will not try to understand and remember. Madame, it is that I am not able to manage them any more."

It was real tragedy to him that they had outgrown him. They had outgrown her too, and to her, too, it was tragedy.

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She turned sharply away from them all at the table, and went to the nearest window, and stood there, with her back to the room. It was the sum of all the tragedies: the people's griefs and cares, that she felt with them; their ugly mood, outcome of suffering; the lack of every means of helping them, of doing anything—and so much needed to be done—for them, or for the house of Philip's people, or for his little sons. She knew just how indicative it was of her helplessness, to stand and stare out of the dark window, as if there were something she wanted to see.

The light from the window fell on the drifting fog outside. She could discern one edge of the drive under the window, unraked and weed-grown. The mists at the window were a drift of ghosts, of cold wet white ghosts, that all of them were coming out of the future.

And then, suddenly, the boys and the dogs with a rush, were beside her. "Oh, Maman, listen, don't you hear! It's an automobile coming! Listen! There's the horn, at the turn past the village! It's the horn of the old Bayeux automobile! Don't you know it? Somebody's coming from the train."

It could not be Philip, his leave was quite two months off. She told herself it could not be Philip.

Monsieur l'Abbé had come to the window also.

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The boys were dancing with excitement, and the dogs were leaping about. "If it comes in at the gate, it will be papa!"

The window was like a tall door, out to the drive. Charlotte flung it open. They could hear, through the dark, that the automobile had indeed turned in at the gate. It was coming up the drive.

They were all out on the gravel. Charlotte was still telling herself that it could not be Philip. The one headlight of the automobile shone out from the trees at the edge of the park woods, then a dip in the road hid it. It came past the lime-trees, and was hidden by the elms of the turn. Then it came straight through the mist, showing the untrimmed edges of the drive, the tall grass where the lawn used to be. And then it came to the door.

The glare of the headlight and the noise of the engine running down were bewildering; the children were shouting and the dogs barking. A tall, thin figure was getting out of the automobile, in the tangle and clamour of boys and dogs.

The motor had stopped its noise. Monsieur l'Abbé had come out from the window of the small salon. The entrance-door was open, and old Denis had come, and was fussing about his

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master's things, and settling the fare with the chauffeur from Bayeux.

Charlotte had time to think, "He is really here, and it is all right. He will make everything all right." She did not speak to him, or look up into his face, but when she got to him, among the boys and dogs, she slipped her hand through his arm and into his hand.

In the hall, still holding him like that, she was thinking, "I will tell him everything. I will tell him now. He will talk to Godart to-night——" Her hand held his very fast.

It was because of his hand that, suddenly, everything changed. Suddenly she realized that his hand trembled, and was cold, and clung to hers.

She had been so sure of his laughing down at her. Now she looked up, and there was no laughter in his eyes. His eyes were hollow, his face was haggard and white. She thought, how ill he looked! He must be very ill. Then she knew it was something worse than illness. She had thought she could not bear things any more. But it was he who had not been able to bear things.

For an instant she realized only that it was worse than anything she had ever imagined. Then she stopped thinking of anything, but that he needed

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her. She had thought she needed him, but it was he who needed her. She drew her hand out of his, and standing on tiptoe, he was so tall, began to unfasten the clasps and buttons of his big blue coat.

He said, looking down at her, but as if, somehow, he did not see her at all, "I—I am afraid I'm tired."

The little boys were tugging at his coat, that Denis was waiting to take from him. Denis, who had loved him all his life, and his father all his life before him, fussed about him, as old people fuss and worry. "My captain is so wet! My captain is all covered with mud!"

"It always rains," said Philip.

"My captain is not ill?" the old servant asked anxiously.

"No, not ill," said Philip. He turned his head and looked at Denis. Charlotte had an odd impression that Denis was the only one of them all he really saw. "Not ill, only one night it was horrible." He stood looking at the old man and said, again, "One night it was horrible."

Charlotte said, "You've come home, that's good enough. Don't let's bother."

But it was not to her, it was to old Denis, he went on speaking. "One night it was horrible.

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Denis, if it had not been for your grandson——" He broke off, and began again. "I have ten days' leave. Denis, I will tell you about it later, when I'm not so tired. Young Denis and I, we exchanged leaves."

The boys were chattering, both together, Monsieur l'Abbé was speaking to one of them; but Philip's words made a silence that they seemed to stay on in, heavily. "We exchanged leaves." The words lasted very long, it seemed to Charlotte, between him and old Denis, there, in the hall.

It was old Denis who first moved in the silence. He had taken his master's coat, and stood with it for an instant, there where he was. Then he went with it to the big oak settle, and arranged it, spreading it out that it might dry. And then he came back to his master, and stood before him as tall and straight as he could, poor little bent old man. "So Denis will not be coming home for two months yet, my captain?"

"Oh, yes, after next week, he will come as soon as I get back there. It is all arranged for. I am more grateful than I can say, to him. I feel badly, Denis, to come in his place to-night. But it seemed—it seemed—I could not——"

"It is very well, my captain. He is young and very strong. It is his part. He has no responsi-

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bilities, or cares. My captain must not stay here, wet, in this cold hall."

The boys were begging their father, "What have you got for us? Have you got a Death's-Head Hussar's helmet for us?" Niki was saying, "Now papa's come, we can have the quince jam for tea, can't we? Papa, you said you'd bring us a cartridge-belt!"

Philip went on, speaking to Denis still. "He has never broken down; he is so young and so strong; he has no cares." He was oddly repeating what the old manservant had said. "He has no responsibilities or cares."

"Papa, did you bring us the cartridge-belt?"

Charlotte said, "Let your father alone, children, run now and have your tea with Monsieur l'Abbé. Monsieur l'Abbé will excuse your lessons, and will play dominoes with you, and Denis will give you quince jam. Run, take the dogs." She turned gaily from Philip, and drove them off, towards the door of the little salon.

The Abbé shut the door after them all.

Denis stood waiting. It was again so quiet in the hall that Charlotte heard the hoot of an owl from the woods across the lawns. She remembered, as if it were of long ago, how afraid she had been of that trailing sad cry of the owl.

She said to Philip, "Let's go up to your study,

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they will have lighted the fire there. Have you had anything to eat? Denis will bring us up something." She was coaxing him as she might have coaxed the little boys. "Let's go and be just alone."

Old Denis went ahead of them with the lamp, up the stairs. He climbed up slowly, but Philip moved even more slowly than he did.

The upper gallery was full of mists. The windows along its length let the ghosts come in, but they did not frighten Charlotte any more. At the far end of the gallery, towards the South Tower, lamplight, and the light of a just-kindled fire, made a glow of the mists at the open door of Philip's study.

The room, and Philip's things, that Charlotte never could bear to see when he was away, were come to life now in the firelight, with all their comfort and pleasant influences.

He did not even look about him. He sat before the fire in the big leather chair, leaning back, his arms dropped over the sides of the chair, his eyes closed.

Charlotte had loved him because he was young and gay. Now he seemed grown old, and she knew, she knew quite well, that he never would be gay any more. She had loved him because he was quick and full of life, did all things well, laughing,

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feared nothing. With a new passion of tenderness, she loved him now as she never had loved him before.

Nothing in her life had ever touched her as did his sudden dependence on her, the way he let her take care of him. Her pity and tenderness were an agony, and an ecstasy.

He scarcely spoke, except to say to her once, as he had said to old Denis in the hall, "One night it was terrible." And once to say, "I will tell you afterwards, now I cannot seem to remember."

She watched the night out, and was not tired. The strange little sounds of night through the old house were not fearful any more, but rather kept her company. The wind rose after midnight, and its cry through the trees and about the towers was part of a loneliness she had almost forgotten.

In the small, chill hours before dawn she knew that she was not afraid any more, not of war, nor of the dark, nor of anything. She was not even afraid of the thing he would have to tell her.

II

He told her of it the first day he went out, the morning of his third day. For two days she had not been able to coax him from his room. The

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weather had changed in the night of his coming, and the days were blue and golden through the autumn colours of woods and fields.

He told her, while they walked together, that third morning, across the red stubble of buckwheat towards the sea. He told her only the outline of it, not letting himself make pictures of it for her. It was all part of the thing that those who understand must save others from understanding.

They were to attack after dark that night. It would be no worse than the attacks of countless other nights. About among the men just before, he had got the illusion that his head was made of glass, and that the sound of the guns was shattering it. He knew he had been trying to tell something very strange to young Denis, but he did not know what it was. He could not remember anything else of all that night, except that it was terrible.

He stopped in the path and stood looking straight before him, over the shorn red fields, where the larks were singing. Even if Charlotte had never imagined war, she would have still have known its horror from the look that was in his eyes. He drew his hand across his eyes to wipe out visions. "Young Denis led the attack," he said.

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They walked on together. That was all he could remember. They had said he was ill, that he must get away for a bit. It was young Denis who insisted on their exchanging leaves. Young Denis was taking his place now, back there.

III

His having failed gave her a new kind of pride in him. That he should have gone on and on through the dreadful years, seemed to her all the finer now she knew what it had meant to him. Even for a born soldier like young Denis, with real love of war, finding his element in it, there was suffering enough. But for Philip there was only the suffering. To see the others suffer—he suffered for them all, it was the whole world's suffering. For three years he had kept her from understanding.

He did not intend now to let her see. He never talked to her again as he had talked that morning in the buckwheat field. It was from the way he talked about his men that she got most of her knowledge. Much of it came from hearing him talk of young Denis with his grandfather. Listening, she understood how his love for his men and their love for him had helped him through it.

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His men, young Denis and all of them, had understood. From them there was no need of forgiveness. And for them he would go back, and redeem his failure, a thousand times.

All Charlotte cared for in these days of his leave, was to make every moment its best for him, so that he might have peace, and come to himself again, and be himself when he went back. In all his other leaves she had dreaded his going back, but now she would be glad of it for him.

The troubles of the château and the estate seemed nothing to her. She wondered that she had even thought it would be worth while to talk of that to him. To her now, as to the men in the trenches, the moment was all there was of it, and to be made the most of.

Every little pleasant thing was to be made the most of. He noticed little things, as he never had before, the taste of the spring water, the fragrance of lavender that clung to the house linen, the quiet, the being able to stand upright and speak aloud and move in wide spaces, and see fields that were not burnt black and sundered and torn, and trees that were alive. All those things, their loveliness and quietness, made a dream of the days for him. He went about in the dream, and nothing outside it touched him. He realized noth-

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ing of the disaster that menaced his home, that was drawing in every day nearer, or of the ill will of the people who had given his house allegiance for so long.

When he asked her, on one of those days, why the big old bell by the door of the entrance court was never rung any more at the hours of lunching and dining, she said: "Isn't it rung?" as if she never had given a thought to it. How afraid she was he might learn of the minatory anonymous letter, that had demanded if the bell were rung just that the poor of the countryside, hungry, might know twice a day of the château's feasting? The château's feasting—if only she could make them understand how barely enough there was in the dishes that old Denis, always in his white gloves, placed on the little table in a corner of the dining-hall.

In the last days of Philip's leave he went all about among the farms, and in the villages. Charlotte marvelled that he did not see how much was wrong. He would surely have come to know, if it had not been for the vague dream peace he moved about in. From too great suffering he was come back as from too long a distance. He looked at things all with unaccustomed eyes, and had no time to understand. She was grateful that the people did not complain to him. Perhaps

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it was that he seemed to them vague and far off as they seemed to him.

On the Sunday, coming out among them all after Mass, into the road that was the one street of the home village, where its few roofs of thatch and moss were clustered under the old square grey tower of the church, he stopped again and again to give his hand to men who had come to be his enemies, and they all, not too reluctantly, spoke for a little with him—of the apples that were poor this year, and of the bad condition of the pasture-lanes. Charlotte had a sense of trouble still pushed off, like a thick black veil.

IV

THE golden weather lasted. One day they all went down to the sea, she and Philip and the two little boys. It was the last day. They must be home before tea time, for at six o'clock the automobile from Bayeux was to come to take Philip over to the night train.

It was a long walk to the sea; by deep sunk pasture lanes, where the hawthorn berries of the hedges were still as red as coral, and the hedges were the colour of amber, and across wide bare fields, that were golden and amethyst, under sunshine and travels of cloud shadows. Niki and

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Guy carried the lunch basket for their picnic on the sands.

For Charlotte the beauty of that day was a rapture so keen that it was almost cruel. The sea had the colours of the jewels that made the visions of saints in ancient days, jasper and emerald and amethyst, sardius and topaz and sapphire. Everything for all that day was lifted for her above other things of life and the world. There was a light that day as if the curtains of heavenly places were drawn aside for its little moment.

The night, gathering down, did not seem cold or dark to her, after that day.

They had tea and the quince jam in the small salon by the lamp and the fire. Then they heard the horn of the Bayeux automobile coming through the dark.

It was all oddly like that other night, when he had arrived; old Denis helped him on with his coat in the hall. Monsieur l'Abbé was there, and the small boys, and the dogs. The dogs leaped about and barked. The small boys begged: "You'll not forget the cartridge-belt, papa, and the Death's-Head Hussar's helmet?" Old Denis fussed and worried, "My captain will be cold in the automobile. My captain should have put on the vest with the lamb's-wool lining."

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It was only to Denis that Philip was speaking at the end. "You will have your grandson with you in a day or two now. I will be seeing him, myself, to-morrow."

The light from the doorway and the light of the automobile's one lamp, together, made a glow of the mist on the weed-grown drive, and on the tangled edge of the lawn. Cold, wet, white ghosts and mists drifted past. The little boys were dancing about their father, as excited over his departure as they had been over his arrival. It was still always to Denis he spoke. It was an odd last thing he said to the old man servant: "Tell young Denis how proud you and I are of him, and tell him how much I want him to have reason always to be proud of me."

Charlotte had her arm through his at the very last minute, and her hand in his, in its big glove. She knew that of the lovely thing they had between them, he and she, of understanding and help and faith, there was complete expression in just the touch of their two hands together; and that nothing more beautiful than such a sure and quiet touch ever could be asked of life.

She stood and watched the lamp of the automobile go away through the dark. She watched it go away, past the familiar landmarks, the great elms of the turn, the lime-trees. The dip in the

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road hid it. She saw it once more, far off in the mist on the edge of the park woods. And then it was gone. She thought she would never be afraid of the dark again.

She turned back, and went up the steps, and in at the great doorway, with the boys and the dogs, and the Abbé, and old Denis. The boys were teasing, "Not lessons to-night, please, Maman!" The lamp was lighted on the table, under the antlers of that long ago, last, splendid chase.

"The post boy came to-night early," said old Denis, "and there is a letter. I forgot to tell the captain. Madame la Marquise must forgive me. I put the letter there on the table, and forgot. There is still no word for Amélie, Madame la Marquise. Suzon came over from the Carrelle farm, and says they have good news of Alain in the hospital."

It was a military letter for Philip. She thought she would open it; there might be something she should telegraph to him.

The Abbé was saying, "Madame, we have lost already ten whole days of work."

Old Denis was gathering up various things, gloves and sticks, and things, that his master had left flung about. "I have a postcard from young Denis," he was saying, "of Tuesday; he

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was well, and sent his homages to Madame la Marquise, and to his Captain."

Charlotte was opening the military letter. Suddenly it seemed to her that everything stood still and listened. Now she knew why, that other night, Philip's words had stayed so long in the silence of the cold dim hall. It seemed to her that now they would always and always remain there.

The letter was from Philip's sergeant. It read:

"My Captain,—

"I write with deepest regret to give you sad news. Our Lieutenant, Denis Seguin, was killed in the attack of the night of Tuesday and Wednesday, which he led with that carelessness of personal danger of which you yourself, my Captain, so constantly set us example. We were fortunately able to carry him in while he was still alive. He asked me, my Captain, to express to you his utmost devotion, and request that you break to his old grandfather, in your employ, the news of his death.

"I have the honour, my Captain, to be,

"Your faithful and obedient——"

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THE CAULDRON

IT IS not only winter at the high windows that makes the ward now always dark and cold. Everything is grown numb. One seems not able to care any more.

This morning I could not even be glad about the 10 bis., the boy they called my little monkey, "le ouistiti de madame," who is splendidly well, and went off at noon for his twenty days' leave.

He will "go back," and we shall never know what becomes of him, and some one else will be brought in, perhaps like him aged eighteen, to his stretcher bed, in the row down the middle of the long crowded ward.

This morning the bed at the top of the ward, 17, opposite the door from the stairs, was empty, the man with the red hair was gone from it. On the stairs, arriving, I had met the stretcher being carried down, with a sheet thrown over it. It was the canvas stretcher, it sagged down only a little between its poles, the man with the red

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hair had become so light. How small he seemed to be under the sheet. They all seem to get so small when they are dead.

The linen of bed 17 had been taken away already, the mattress and pillow stared up in their blue and white striped ticking. The blanket was folded, and the black rubber sheet, and they were laid neatly beside the pillow on the mattress. It gave me a feeling of going away, a ridiculous delightful feeling of being back in a time when there was no war, and things were packed, and one was starting out on a beautiful journey. But the bed must be got ready, as soon as we had time for it, for some new 17. And he too, by one way or another, sooner or later, would be gone from it. And there it would be, staring and waiting again.

Always and always and always, coming and going, going and coming, until sometimes it seems that all these men are just one man to whom these things happen eternally, round and round. Sometimes I see all the things on the dressings table, the bottles and jars and basins and sterilizing boxes, stand out through smoke, against heaps on heaps of bundles of blue clothes, that have boots and heads sunk down. I only know battlefields from the heaps of clothes that lie thrown down on the floor in the hall, in the rush when

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new wounded are brought in,—of course on battle-fields they would have boots, and heads sunk down. The heaps of them are so high that they are come to be the background of all life, for ever and ever.

To-day, doing the things I used to find beautiful, I was saying to myself, almost aloud, "And ever shall be, world without end, and ever shall be, world without end."

To-day again Madame Marthe had one of her headaches. She is a tiny pallid creature, like a white mouse, but when she has headaches her face gets big and red. Her eyes were swollen, because of her headache—had she been any one else I would have thought she had been crying. I did not ask her if her husband were worse, or if anything had happened to little Louis-Charles. It seemed of no use asking.

Once, months ago, when first I learned that her husband had become bedridden—the Patronne told me—I wanted to help, and Madame Marthe said, "I myself can do for him all he needs." She said it with the air of contempt she has when she says, "I prefer to fetch the boiled water myself." When I used to ask her how he was, she would say, "Thank you," without telling me, just as she would shrug her shoulders when I asked her how ever she managed the cauldron.

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She and her husband and the little Louis-Charles live somewhere among the buildings of the hospital; until her husband became ill, he too was employed there.

After the world of the sick of the hospital, the five or six hundred wounded soldiers, and the more than two thousand civilians, there is the world of its work-people. Lodged up under lovely old blue roofs, and down in splendid stone-vaulted half storeys, or in the more modern buildings of the exterior courts, about the electric plant, and the steam laundry, and the morgue, and the poultry yard, and the vegetable garden, and the ancient half ruined little shooting pavilion of a king's lady—there is that world of hidden things, like the white things that live at the roots of plants. One sees them at soup times, swarming together about their refectory door. For more than three hundred years the hospital has treated illnesses that often leave marks better not shown outside its red brick and grey stone boundary walls; and many of the people cured there stay on afterwards, to make the living, poor as it was, that they would be denied elsewhere. The husband of Madame Marthe is one of those people.

In the first winter of the war, when I stood far more in awe of Madame Marthe even than I stand

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now, when a word of hers in praise or blame quite made or unmade me, I met her one day in the central court with a big splendidly built man in an orderly's blouse. He must, before illness took him, have been remarkably handsome, a great rollicking fellow, much younger than Madame Marthe. From a distance he was handsome now, but near by, his face was dreadful. Madame Marthe drew herself up, and said in her proudest voice, looking straight at me with her proudest look, "This is my husband." It was as if she dared me not to find him beautiful. As if she would make an armour of her pride in him, to protect him from any flinching of mine, or a weapon of it, to threaten me if I flinched. I screwed up my courage afterwards to say to her, "I am glad to have met your husband." But she made no answer, and never again spoke of him.

When he had a stroke it was only after some time that I knew of it. Then it was not Madame Marthe, but the Patronne who told me. She said, "He may live for years. Lucky for Marthe that she is fool enough to think him a treasure." Rubbing her big bare arms and chuckling, the Patronne said, "For me, I think she is better off with him ill; when he was well, and a beauty, it was a dog's own life he led her."

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But this morning her eyes were very red and swollen round.

The house doctor came to do certain of the dressings. There is always trouble when he comes to do the dressings. He had been badly wounded and had got his discharge in the first year; he had done something magnificently brave, but no one remembers now what it was. He had been a hero, but now he is a sickly poor thing, usually cross, who carries complaints to the Patronne.

This morning everything went wrong. The house doctor had reason to scold, and he did scold. Madame Marthe did not seem to care enough to get angry. It seemed nothing could penetrate her sullen indifference. Her air of more than ever despising everything fretted badly the house doctor's nerves. He did not know how desperately it was all confused with the price of milk and eggs for her husband, and coals; and his staying alone all day while she was here at the hospital; and there being nobody to keep their wild little Louis-Charles out of mischief; and one of the men's screaming all the time of his dressing, his mouth open perfectly round for the screams to come out of; and my not having flamed enough basins, or unrolled enough cotton; and the house doctor's wanting so many more washings than we had reckoned for.

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There had to be more boiled water fetched. For four years I have been a failure at fetching the boiled water. It has been for four years my great humiliation under Madame Marthe's scorn that I could not manage the cauldron. Nobody outside our service can possibly know what it means to fetch the boiled water. It has been my nightmare for four years.

The cauldron, enormous and black on the pantry oven, is as heavy as the round world. It has handles like two huge lope ears. Madame Marthe can take it with one hand, by one horrid ear, and tip it, and have her other hand free for steadying the jug, purchased against her knees, quite easily under it. But I need both hands for it, and my knees are of no use whatever. Madame Marthe says, with that shrug of her shoulders, "Oh là-là, name of a pipe, it is less trouble to do it myself."

This morning she said to the house doctor, "Name of a pipe, I must go myself then—she always makes such a mess of it."

But the house doctor said to her, "Stand where you are, and hold that." And to me, "No nonsense, now, quick, fetch it."

Always the same gestures to go through in the pantry, where there is always the same stale clean smell, that is almost the worst of

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the hospital smells. Always to drag over the chair, scraping the tiles, close under the oven, and to stand the jug on it, and, on tip-toe, to reach across everything, and take the cauldron by its ears.

The cauldron has no lip. If the water spreads out as one pours, over the oven and the chair and the tiles, the pantry girl scolds till they can hear her in the wards. Her voice is worse than the scraping of the chair on the tiles. Sometimes it seems the most dreadful thing in the world to be shrieked at by the pantry girl. Madame Marthe hears, and comes, and gives that look of hers.

This morning the pantry girl was not there. There was a pile of tin plates on the chair. I had to move them all over to the table. There were thousands and thousands of plates, for ever and ever, world without end. I thought I did not care how long it took; what did it matter, out of the days and days, and the years?

But Madame Marthe came; I suppose the house doctor had scolded her because I was so slow. Her head was very high in the air. Could there be an immensely proud white mouse, with its eyes swollen and its head in the air? She did not speak to me, or so much as look at me, she just pushed me out of the way, snatching up the jug, and kicking the chair aside. She fitted the jug between her

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knees, holding the top of it with one hand, and with her other hand seized one ear of the cauldron. If the water had been boiling, I think she would have drowned herself in it, and not minded at all.

But all that happened was that she poured too fast, and the water went over everything, the oven, her blouse, her shoes, the tiles. She had to let go of the jug and give all her strength to the cauldron, or it would have come quite over. The tin jug clattered on the tiles. I thought the Patronne, far off in her office, would hear. Surely the house doctor heard, waiting angrily in the ward.

Quite suddenly I was crying. And then I became aware of an amazing thing.

Madame Marthe was crying. Proud Madame Marthe, who could do anything in the world, and was scornful of everything, who never yielded, never admitted, never failed, was crying before the cauldron.

I dared not look at her. I turned my face away. "It is so long," I said, and picked up the jug.

She snatched the jug from me. "It is too long," she said. She tried to wipe her eyes against the soaking wet sleeve of her blouse. And then she had to put the jug down again, that she might rummage among all those odd things

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in her apron pocket, dressing scissors and string and safety pins, and mysterious papers all wet through, and two slices of wet bread, with something between them, that had been intended for her lunch, but never a handkerchief. "Give me yours," she said, "can't you?"

There was all of it waiting for us to go back to, to go on and on and on with, bottles and bandages, pails of things to be emptied, things to be washed, soup at 11, the bed of 17 to be made up, the house doctor with his rubber gloves, and behind all of it those heaps of blue clothes, piled higher and higher.

We stood for a minute looking away from one another, both of us crying.

Then Madame Marthe gave me my handkerchief back, and took up the jug once more, but with no shrug of her shoulders. "Name of God, it is too long," she said, beginning again at the cauldron.

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PART II

NOSTALGIA

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NOSTALGIA

ONCE upon a time there was a mood that beautiful things brought about, and that was like a place one's spirit could go away into, quite, quite away; a place of refuge.

Something beautiful, of colour, of light, of sound, and there one was, beyond confusions and griefs, safe, for a moment.

The thought of something beautiful some one had done, of just the words "courage," "sacrifice;" of God saying: Let there be Light, and there was Light; and one saw beyond.

Every beautiful thing was a veil's lifting, a door's opening.

Certain notes of the wind in the chimney; white flowers in starlight in a garden; the curve of a street, of a road in the country; distances of forests, and of the sea; certain massings of roofs; a candle lit down a wet passage; water flowing along a wall. The sense of death as exquisite, a passing that one was half in love with. The

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loneliness of twilights, and of certain music, that made one sad for all the great vague dream sorrows of the world.

The exaltation, long ago when sunshine mattered, that made one want to give one's life, and all one had, all, everything.

The mood of these things was a place one seems to have lost the way to.

I

Once upon a time there used to be the month of May, and all the wide pastures of the North were sunshiny and newly green, and full of very new little white lambs.

There was the soft low sky of the North, that never was bright, for all the sunshine, not intense, like the sky of the South, but just a lovely sky, kind to dreams.

There were those quiet lines of all the four horizons, where woods were mauve, or fields were mauve, or hills were mauve, always. Sometimes the mauve was pale, like the little short-stemmed violets one used to find before the war on sunny banks, and by road edges. And sometimes it was dark purple mauve, like the big violets that lived against the woods, and along shadowy streams.

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The lines of forests hung over the fields; the lines of the hills lay very soft along the sky; and all the lines, of rivers, of long roads between rows of poplars, of roofs and chimney-pots and church-towers, where little towns were gathered together under elm and oak and lime-trees, were so in harmony, that they rested one, as certain music used to do.

The grey of the old quiet towns was the grey that in tubes and on palettes is called French-grey; the red-brown of a ploughed field was as alive and young as were the differing greens of wheat and barley and rye; the fields of yellow colza flowers made sheets of sun. Where there was water it was always the colour of the sky. And there was, always, everywhere, something of mist that was dreamy and mauve. All the colours of things so belonged with their lines that it was like music, like a singing of old light rather sad ballads, with refrains of no meaning, wistful and sweet.

There were women, once upon a time, in round white caps, and wooden shoes; and men in wooden shoes, and perfectly beautiful blue worn and faded and stained cotton smocks. And there were ploughs in fields, and sleepy white horses, that seemed always to be standing still, and red cows with red calves, and high two-wheeled market

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carts, heaped with green or pale yellow, daffodil-yellow.

Where that land touched the sea, there were grey forts on the hills in crocus-yellow broom; and in the sea-towns, masts tilted against the grey houses, and red brown sails came up the streets, and red brown nets were spread everywhere to dry, and in the market places one heard the sea-gulls cry, and smelt tar and the seaweed.

The salt tang of the sea was on the border of that land, but deeper in there were all the fragrances of orchards, and hawthorn hedges, lilac and acacia.

Once upon a time, in May, there were a thousand apple-orchards. An apple-orchard in blossom, in sunshine, birds and bees and butterflies and white clover.

There were some low grey roofs over the edge of clear green shallow waves of rye; and there was a square grey ancient church-tower, over the roofs, from which were ringing all day long, through the sunshine, those joyous bells of the month of the Blessed Mary.

Once upon a time, in May, there was a stream, whose edges were as blue with forget-me-nots as its waters were blue with the sky.

There used to be woods in May—not forests,

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only woods,—young, sunshiny, chestnut and oak and beech, full of voices of blackbirds and finches and thrushes and linnets.

The swallows used to come back in May, to chimneys and eaves and towers.

Chimneys and eaves and towers, and tops of all the trees, and that strange little cry of swallows in noons and twilight over the cobbles of the market place.

Once upon a time, in the North, in May, there was a proud old town, very much left alone.

The Place before the cathedral was always empty. In the South, markets with red umbrellas crowd up to their cathedral's yellow steps and lions; but in the North, old grey cathedrals stand quietly apart from the lives of their towns.

All the May noons were soft and sunny in the Place, and dimly blue, or dimly mauve, indefinite, belonging with the grey of the empty Place, and the sunshine that was veiled in gauze.

Not a thing stirred in the Place, except the swallows.

The swallows flew, high about the three great spires of the cathedral, and low over the cobbles, where moss and grass were almost as grey as the stones.

A blackbird lived in the garden of the bishop's

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palace, but at noon he was not singing. One could not see him anywhere. He must have been asleep in the grey-green leaf and purple plumes of the lilacs, whose fragrance hung motionless in the thick sunshine.

There was a beech-tree in the garden of the bishop's palace, and its leaves in May were spring-time yellow, that made one think of crocuses and daffodils and primroses. They were still close curled leaves, perhaps the gauzy thickness of the sunshine hindered their unfolding. It was odd how the swallows called and wheeled and darted through so dense a sunshine.

Once upon a time it rained in Normandy, in a deep green country, that smelled of cows and honeysuckle, it rained and rained and rained, the whole May long.

All the sunken lanes between their high banks of blackberry and fern, under their hawthorn hedges, where the tops of the apple-trees reached over, were turned into brown rivers, that frothed white as the moss and stones caught up their little running. All the grass lanes of field and pasture were marshes of daisies and buttercups and clover.

The cows and the cow-bells came down at milking-time to the pasture bars between the hedges,

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in the rain. Blackbirds and thrushes and linnets sang in the rain, as if, like the frogs, they belonged to it. Big wet bumble-bees went about their business, humming in the rain.

The sky came down into pastures and grain-fields and orchards and woods, and was soft upon them, through them, grey; dove-grey, pearl-grey, cobweb-grey, and mauve, like those tall bell-shaped flowers that used to grow, before the war, against the garden wall.

Once upon a time, when it was May, before the war, there was a Curé's garden, unlike any other Curé's garden in the world. There was box in it, and there was ivy, just as in other gardens, and there were little trimmed yew-trees, and grape-vines whose flowers the bees loved, lilac and quince bushes, and rose bushes, with tight hard green buds in May, forget-me-nots and stock and wallflowers, lilies-of-the-valley and mignonette and violets; but there were also other things among the grasses.

The ancient presbytery, across the road that was the one street of the village, opposite the church-yard-gate, had been years ago "taken over," and was now the Mairie, with the statue of Our Lady gone from her niche over the door. So the Curé's house was only one of the thatched white

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little houses behind the churchyard, the last one, close against the churchyard wall. The window of the Curé's kitchen—where there were onions and gourds and many such lovely things, spread to dry on the stone floor,—opened out like a door, up three steps, to the level of the churchyard wall.

And so it was that the Curé's garden was full of crosses in its grass, among its box and ivy and May blossoming.

The sun used to come up out of that land, before the war, so quietly, with all his Northern mists, that it was a wonder the birds knew he was coming. They knew, and waked and told of it, yet in the dark. The clarion of the cocks from the farm-court, and the chattering of sparrows were beautiful to meet the sunrise, with the melody of larks.

Then the mists were luminous, and there was light, without any shadows. And then things had soft, uncertain shadows, and misty colours. And then there was the sun, over the mauves and pearls and opals of the land. And all the birds were silent, and all the land was silent, and no other silence of Time and the World was like the silence of that moment when the sun came.

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In the South, the sun comes up with such glory that one must hide one's eyes from him. In the North, he is not magnificent at all, but just the dear sun that one can look at, and not be dazzled.

Once upon a time there were magic nights in the North in the month of May.

There were bird-notes, sleepy, in the nights. And all the fragrances of May, and of that land, were the more lovely because one could not see their lovely things, and knew them so, just quite by themselves, in the dark.

Sometimes I remember it as if the moon were always a crescent-moon in May, every night, the whole month through, over the shadow of the hills. A little silver clear pure fragile moon, always new. But sometimes again I think it must have been a great round full silver moon, long ago, before the war, every night of every May, which steeped the orchards so deep in quietness, and gave such mystery to the tinkle of sheep-bells from the pasture, the new little bleating of lambs, the song of the frogs from the marshes, the owl's call. The frogs used to sing from out of the moon-lit mists of the marshes, and their song was not lonely, like the song of the frogs in the South. None of it was lonely, not even the calling of the

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owls from the edge of the woods. And all of it was under a spell.

The moon made of the garden an enchanted place, under its old, old box-hedges—its lettuces and cabbages and tall bean-vines on their poles frosted silver with dew, the little ancient clipped yew-trees by the well, black, so very black, in all that great calm whiteness.

The moon showed all the lovely symmetrical lines of the château mansards, clear and light in the dark frame of the trees of the park, the oak and elm and lime walls and avenues, and made of it a place wherein one was sure people must be happy always, for ever, delicately, in brocades and laces.

And in the village, in the little empty market place, the moonlight made the crumbling old church-tower, the thatched roofs, the shut dark low doorways, very exquisite and strange.

II

Once upon a time there were grainfields standing tall, a little bronzed, flamed through with poppies, wide, till one thought of the sea, but belonging to men as the sea never can belong to them, responsive, kind, sweet and warm with the smells of ripening under the sun.

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There were beetfields, of dull stained crushed colours, dimmed reds and purples, under the Madonna-blue of the sky.

Far off on the deeper coloured edge of things, there were big dark straw-ricks, that looked like thatched houses, with their thatched houses beside them, and square church-towers, and round tops of lime-trees.

All the edges of things seemed very far away. And yet the sky was so near, all about.

The forest, far off, over the edge of the fields, was blue, royal blue, dark upon the other blue of the sky. Only when one came to it, it was of ten thousand greens.

There used to be flaunting magpies in the roads, and priestly crows, and larks were singing over the beetfields and fields of corn and grain.

When one came to the forest, where it stood like a wall, there were hundreds of rabbits, with their long ears and cotton tails.

The forest was clear of undergrowth, as its kings had used to keep it for their hunting. The distances, open between the mossy boles of the trees, sunlit and shadowed, led very far under the lift and stir and poise of numberless midsummer greens.

Down a long grass road there were deer, a stag

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with tossed antlers, does and their fawns, ready for flight, stopping to look.

In the beetfields a man and his long afternoon shadow stooped together at their toil, and they had the significance that wide laboured empty spaces always give to human things.

The corn and grainfields had their waves, but the beetfields kept perfectly still.

The clouds and their shadows travelled the wide fields.

Mists, the colour of opals, used to come up from the river and her tall reeds and pollard willows, and wander across the fields.

The crickets and grasshoppers shrilled in the fields, and their little sawing voices used to make a lovely music, under the quiver of heat.

Past the church and its tower and the graves, and the duck pond, and Nazarette's little dark shop that smelt of shoes and spices; and the fountain, and the children at school, and the smithy and all the things of the village, in the last house, where the village stopped short on the edge of the forest, there was a very humble old little room, to which it is strange to think of great destruction coming. What had war to do with the black rafters, and the red tiled floor, and the stone hearth, black from generations of fires?

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Or with the tall clock in the corner, and the calendar of years ago, ladies and roses, very faded, pinned above the ancient dresser on the whitewashed wall? Was it of death that the wind from the forest used to sing so blithely in the chimney? Had these things been always written in the every minute's play of sunlight, filtered in green from the forest, and every minute's shadows, among the time stains on the walls?

The sky was always, always the sky of just that land, and of no other.

The sky of the North was young and glad. The sky of the South was always old, and burned and burned, and yet never burnt out.

But this was the sky of the heart of France, and one loved it, not wistfully, vaguely, as one loved the sky of the North, not passionately, mysteriously, with the love as bittersweet and strange as the taste of mountain herbs, that one gave to the sky of the South, but with a love that was an implicit allegiance.

Once upon a time, when there was sunset, two figures came up over the rim of the hill, and were there, for a minute, lifted, alone, dark, above the darkening fields, against the lit sky.

A woman bent under some heavy load, and a

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small child, close beside her, clinging to her skirt.

Arrested, between two great calm spaces, they were heroic figures, full of meaning, with something magnificent, of humanity, of Eternity, lent them, for a minute.

Once upon a time there was a storm that passed on. The clouds lifted away from the sunset, over the edge of the fields.

The sun had gone down behind the fields, but the sky, between the edge of the fields and the edge of the low clouds, was a river of pure clear gold. The clouds over it, and the land under it, both were dark with the night that was coming.

The straight road, across the fields toward the sunset, was so wet after the rain, that it reflected the light of the sunset; and the big lumbering purple horse, with his purple hay-cart behind him, came splashing down along a golden road.

Once upon a time they were cutting the hay in all that country. The air was full of the smell of it, and of the sound of the scythe, and of the hot burden of the field things' voices, grasshoppers, crickets. All the whole land was of those tempered molten colours the sun of midsummer gives.

The poplars gave stripes of shadow to the long

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white roads. The white roads swam in the heat. The white stones that marked the leagues were very very far apart from one another. Deep white dust lay still along the roads.

The blue road of the river was almost as motionless as the road where the dust was white.

And because of the fresh smell of the cut grass nobody could be tired.

In that country all things passed lightly, gracefully, then, before the war, seasons and hours, glories and their fadings out, winds and shadows and drifts of silver rain.

Across the river there were some low blue roofs, that were silvery in the mists and sunshine with their church tower, among the silvery leaf of willow and aspen and poplar, over the quiet silvery reaches of barley and rye. And there were the four great round towers of the château, its turrets and battlements swimming in the sky's vague silvery blue.

Nearer, the silver shining of the river was arched and arched again, four times I think, by an old bridge, that used to seem to float along a silver blur of sand and river.

From the path along the top of the ramparts

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one looked down on all the roofs of the town. Long ago the town had crowded up close about its château, that those strong towers might watch over it and protect it, and still it stayed so, ages after the towers had lost their strength.

The roofs, close under the broken ramparts, were lovely things of thatch and old worn tiles, dull blue slate and dull red brick, that time and the weather had softened and blurred and shaped. They had stains of moss and lichen, and patches of seed things, that all four winds had blown to them, and that stayed always on with them, blossoming in season.

The roofs pressed close about their château, and leaned all one against another, in the intimacy of things that had known one another for very long.

Once upon a time, in June, there was a rose-garden.

One went out, from the long windows of the salon of the dim mirrors, to the terrace, and down the worn grey steps, between the pots of heliotrope, and along the parterres, to the left, to an archway cut in a high thick black wall of yews.

It was such a strong wall, ages and ages thick and high, that it seemed secure as the walls of a fortress to keep the roses safe.

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There was a fountain leaping out from the square stone basin, at each corner, a little yew-tree clipped into a pyramid; and there were edges of box along the paths.

Once upon a time there came to pass, every June, a great miracle of roses in the garden.

Once upon a time there were Junes when one was happy for nothing at all but because of roses.

Once upon a time there came three storks, all the way over from Alsace and Lorraine, with their long pink legs, and their long black bills.

They stood for a whole day on the roof of the château chapel, over across the entrance court, where the slim pinnacles and spires were lifted gently, delicately, above the massive older walls.

They stood, those storks, the three of them, all in a row, and never uttered a sound, and took no interest at all in anything.

They stood, each on one leg, and gazed out, beyond the terrace, to the still blue distance, that was so exquisite and so royal in its peace.

When it became time for all the poplars of the valley to be lighted, and their tall slim little flames flickered in the sunshine, there used to be a road whose way was set between two rows of candles, all along, through the bronze aftermath

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of the harvest, the wine colours of the vineyards, and the broad stains of the beetfields, past little white houses, with purple and copper-red asters in their door yards, to the river. And then beside the river, running quite blue among her pale sands and little softly yellowing islands, her willows and acacias and aspens.

And upon that road there used to be, abiding, the loveliest lightest peace, whole days and days through, while, all down the hours, the delicate shadows of things grew longer and longer, and the delicate realities of things blended more and more softly away into the quietness that it seemed nothing ever could break.

Multitudes of crows, all the crows of France, used to come to that land visiting, when the fancy took them. Their caravans wound black ways across the sky, and when they settled down upon the fields, they made the yellow gleaned fields their own entirely, and all the air was full of their discoursing.

Once upon a time in the night, there was a big black crow who sat alone, and motionless and silent, on top of a tall peaked hayrick, above the beetfields. Over his shoulder there was the harvest moon, a huge bronze targe. And that was all.

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Except for the moon, in all the wide spaces beyond him, there was nothing. Land and sky were the colour of the moon's warm harvest light, perfectly empty and quiet, free for any one to fill with whatever dreams he had.

Once upon a time, on the great white stone stairs, deep in the night, there was a candle. The lamps of the old wrought-iron torch brackets had been put out hours ago. But the candlelight was golden and warm.

The candlelight was golden, for just a little way, on the worn stone steps, those shallow curved steps that rounded up and up, wide against the big rough blocks of the wall, narrow against the central column with its canopied empty niches.

There was wind abroad, but not much sound of it came to the stairs, the old walls were so strong against it. The flame of the candle was so steady that the shadows scarcely moved.

Everywhere, out of reach of the candle, there was darkness, heights and depths of darkness.

It was beautiful, long ago, before the war, to be a little afraid, of nothing, and a little sad, for no reason at all.

In the fruit-garden, once upon a time before the war, there were white grapes and purple grapes,

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and peaches with red hearts, and apricots and golden plums, and apples, and little brown and scarlet pears, and big blonde pears, that smelt of honey.

There were white doves who lived in the fruit-garden. They had their home in the old pigeon-tower with the blue roofs. They came down to bathe in the stone-ringed basin, and they filled the garden with "their sweet dove sounds."

There were clouds of white butterflies in the fruit-garden, they delayed till very late in it, the sunshine was so warm there. They drifted up and down the paths, along the box-borders and the red lacquer stems of the roses.

White roses used also to delay very long in the garden. All through the season of fruit the white roses flitted about the garden, against the tall raspberry vines and over the red leaves of the strawberries.

The bees were there, droning their warm golden sleepy drone in the fruit-vines, along the sunny yellow wall.

The air in the fruit-garden tasted of the ripe fruit and was mellow, and golden, warm and soft to touch.

The delicate little yellow leaves of the pear-vines were all fallen in the garden paths.

White feathers of the doves were scattered in

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the water of the fountain, that was jade-green always.

Many birds came to the fruit-garden. They did not sing in the fruit season, not even the blackbirds, yet the garden seemed to be full of music, under its golden dome.

The peacocks never came to the fruit-garden. They thought it too humble a place. They liked to spread their tails on the balustrade of the château terrace, against all the charm and dignity and pride of the old royal valley. They thought that all those soft blendings of shapes and colours, lifting lines and lifting colours, the special grace and quality of that land's distances, made, indeed, the only proper background for the spreading of their tails.

Everything in the little town was stained with the colours of grapes. The red and purple heaps of the refuse of the grapes were everywhere, in little dooryards, among the wine-coloured chrysanthemums. The fumes of the vats came out from doorways, under thatched eaves. The sunshine tasted of wine.

In the church there was a wonderful odour of wine, because of the press of Michel, the baker, against the south porch.

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The smell of fresh baked bread used to come also on certain mornings into the church. And all of the things in the church belonged together, wine and bread, and incense and altar candles.

Once upon a time, when the leaves were falling, and there was no war, through those royal forests lovely people went a-hunting, in the misty sunshiny mornings.

All through the forests new yellow leaves were falling slowly, heavily, down across all the avenues and woodways, along the boles of the trees. New leaves lay clear and almost spring-time yellow upon the old fallen leaves, the years' and years' brown depths of leaves, that since all time had kept the forest floor so open and smooth.

Away along the route of the Grand Veneur, through the sunshiny yellow of the falling leaves and the opal drifts of mist, there were pink coats moving, and there was a glint of shining bay and chestnut and sorrel, and the white stir of the pack.

Away down there, at the *carrefour*, by the King's Oak, the bugle sounded the Lancé, through the yellow leaves that were falling, and the pack gave tongue, and all the yellow woods too.

All through the forest there used to be the sound

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of the woodcutter's axe, and the smell of smoke from the huts of the charcoal burners. And there were lovely people in sabots, gathering firewood and mushrooms.

All the aisles of the forest, and its traceried windows, were dim with incense then, and the smell of incense was more reverent in the forest than in any other great cathedral.

Once upon a time there was a mood that belonged to the drawbridge, and to the door between the two great round towers. At all hours and seasons, there was the mood, waiting for one. One might forget it, but always it would be there to surprise.

Going out from the entrance court of the castle, from its grim old walls, to the lawns and gardens and soft haze of woods, one would be caught by the mood and gathered in, for a moment, to a queer reasonless sense of the last time, of its being the last time.

Often and often, that mood of the last time caught one by the throat. Suppose something should happen, and all this in its strength should be gone, or touched, darkened, hurt somehow, that it might never, never, be quite the same again.

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III

THERE were times in the island of ringing bells, when it was winter, and mistral was blowing. The sky, over the masses of sunburnt wind-beaten roofs, and all those domes and gables and towers, would be blue, gorgeously, bitterly blue, and the sunlight bitterly gold, bright and hard, on walls and battlements and ramparts, on the high palace, buttressed down to roofs and bare tree tops, and on the dress of the huge gold Virgin.

All the wooden shutters would bang in the rue Petite Fusterie, and no one would be out on the cobbles, only the big shaggy white dog of the merchant of wood and of brushwood, the dog Nardo, who came from the high Alps and loved the cold.

From the great white high Alps, down came mistral then upon the two rivers, and swept their waters to bright cold blue roughness along their golden stones. Where the piers of the broken bridge caught back the Rhone in his haste, he gave a frenzy of spray to the mountain wind, who flung the spray out, far, and shining, white, and wild.

The wind howled like all the wolves of the world.

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The sheep of the little brown drove coming in, would be afraid, huddled together against the wall by the Porte de la Ligne.

The Porte de la Ligne was a brazen gate. The whole world was made of metals and precious stones. Colours rang in the wind like the sounds of brass and of cymbals.

All the cypresses of the South strained in the wind. All the cypresses of all the great gold dust roads rocked and strained in the wind. The wind tore holes in the hedges and in the reed screens built against him along all the roads and fields, and rushed in through, with whirls of dust and dead leaves, and of living leaves torn from the olives.

The olives were hammered out, their old tarnished silver so tarnished that it was like gold, beaten to whatever shape the wind pleased.

The wind was as strong as the wings of eagles. The wings of the wind would catch up the dust of the roads, with all its old deaths and lives in it, and fling the strange things of it, its potencies, out, across the land.

It was the dust of so much and such long living, of such fine-ground-out stones. Nothing that had been in that land ever was gone from it. Old good and old evil always remained on there, old madnesses and old peace.

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But there never was mistral upon a certain road. It was always perfectly still upon that road, and always there it was September

Once upon a time there was always September upon a certain road, and a great round golden rising full moon on the left, always, and a great round golden setting sun on the right. Across vineyards as warm and glowing as wine, between poplar-trees, between plane trees, once along a great canal with gleams and mists, through plantations of mulberries, through orchards, between walls of cypresses, the road went on and on.

Roads in the North led "home" at the end of the day, to pleasant things, like hearth-fires and candles. But roads in the South were wanderers and pilgrims and strangers, and knew little of abiding places, and led always just on and on.

Once upon a time there was a road that went away. The road went away, deeper and deeper into a strange impersonal country, that never asked and never told, that gave one everything except the clue to its mystery. The past was very living in that country, and the present was not alive at all, only a thing one dreamed. It was a country of vast loneliness, and yet there

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one was never lonely. It was no less sorrowful than other countries, perhaps the most sorrowful of them all, but one's own sorrows in those roads seemed uplifted, seemed to lose their pitifulness, and to be worth the best of one's bearing.

Once upon a time before the war it was September, and there were these things. Once upon a time it made the greatest difference in the world that there were these things.

There were dark strong cypresses and stone-pines and live oaks; olive and fig-trees, very old and very quiet; mulberry-trees and almond, and all the little fragile fruit-trees, in September, when their leaves were golden butterflies.

There were great bare mountains, golden and brown and black, the colours of the skins of wild beasts, panthers, leopards, tigers, lions, mountains that were alive. Wild and alive in their tawny shapes those mountains used to crouch and lie, not asleep but waiting, ages through, in the sun. One could see their great sides rise and fall with their slow and quiet breathing.

There were certain special great bare sweeps of sunshine that belonged only to those mountains, under their own blue sky, wild sunshine, tawny-gold, alive; and there were cloud-masses that used

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to mount up over the mountains, great as the mountains, shaped like them, snow-white, snow-blue, black, purple, with their shadows beneath them, warm, soft, like skins of dark beasts, along the land.

Wild thyme and wild mint, lavender, hyssop and rosemary, there was the classic taste of them in the September sunshine, and the taste of the ripening grapes, with which the vineyards were heavy, in the air that was as golden as wine.

There were rivers of burnt-gold stones, and among the stones flocks of small tawny sheep somehow found pasture, and shepherds stood, wrapped in black cloaks, and big black crows flapped heavily over.

There were golden stones of times so long gone that their stories were no more known; ruins of a castle on a hill-top, splendid, alone, untold of part of the land's mystery; of an aqueduct, some arches, always soaring, broken, along a valley, by a torrent; of a watchtower, once tall and proud, now keeping watch over a few sheep among the olives.

There were those roads that came from out of the ages and went on into the ages. All the roads of that land were wanderers between ages and ages.

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There were towns of sunburnt market places, deep in gold dust, and shady little "cours" with great plane-trees, golden in September, and live singing shining fountains; of streets of steps that went down always to some stony golden river with an old bridge of high arches; and tunnelled, vaulted streets, that brought one out always suddenly upon some vestige of ancient rampart-wall, some vista of the wide sunlit deep secret country.

Other countries were beautiful. But that country was strange. A country of mind and spirit. A deep unfathomable country, holding back something always from one, however far one went along the pilgrim roads.

I do not know which were the most wonderful in that country, the deep blue and golden motionless soundless noons, or the deep soft mysterious twilights; or the moonlight, or the starlight, or the long, long sunsets, or the dawns, that never were new in that ancient country.

In the dawns, once upon a time, there was a mountain town, small and poor and very old, that was itself the crest of a mountain, high against higher mountains, above olive-woods and vineyards and stony fields, and a stony river, and

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those cypress-trees that made black stripes across the wild-beast colours of that land.

Roofs and tall belfry, and ancient walls, the town was come to be all a part of the hill, moulded into it by the touching and shaping of ages, blended, by the ages passing over, into the hill's own live wild colours of rocks and sun.

There was a path that went up to the town, steep and rough and stony as the bed of a torrent, past cypresses, through vines and olives, odours of all the wildness of the mountains.

In the dawns, to climb that path, up out of the valley's dew and shadow, toward the first long golden slanting of the sunrise, the ringing of the sunrise bells, up through the waking of birds and of fragrances, through coming of colour and the shaping of things, and their stirrings and their sounds, to climb the path and know how beautiful were all the smallest things of it, was a happiness it seemed no power on earth could rob one of.

Once upon a time there was a little very ancient stony farm beside the Roman road.

Just beyond the farm there opened from the road a great avenue of ilex, very dark, even in sunny noons, that narrowed its long dark length, down and down, to where once there had been a fortress-château, but now was only a gathering in

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and treasuring of all the blues of the world.

A world of mystery and of story was down there at the end of the ilex avenue. The little farm took no heed of it, and was in perfect keeping with it.

Once upon a time in that country, there happened beautiful things, like the coming out of the sheep at daybreak from their stone rooms under the house, the soft stir of their waking while yet it was dark, the music of their eager hesitating timid little feet across the threshold.

And like the laying of fire on the high stone hearth-block, as upon some old god's altar, sacrifice of twisted knots of olive, that burned blue, and cones of the mountain-pine.

And like the drawing of clear alive mountain water, that had sun in it, and the coolness of far snows in it, and song and leap and laughter in it, at the fountain, by the egg-plants and tomato-vines.

And like the hour when the ox was unyoked from his cart heaped with grapes, in the dusk at the door of the press, and his breathing was deep drawn and contented, under his cream-white antique velvet.

And like a hundred thousand things to be remembered with nostalgia.

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Once upon a time they were threshing the wild carrot, and the smell of it was all through the little old stone house, exquisite with the smell of ages the house always had, and of lavender, in the twilight.

Once upon a time at twilight, the sheep were coming home, down from the mountain-side, through the olives, across the Roman road, and in at the gate that hung always open in the stone wall.

It was September, and the vines on either side of the wall were stained red and purple, and were heavy with the masses they held of red and purple grapes. The plane-tree over the wall was yellow. But there were four little new lambs, very small and white, stumbling along, tired, because their day had been so beautiful in the high pastures.

In the town, so far away that one took all day to get to it, along the Roman road, there was the market-place.

There were pink arcades in the market-place, and huge old plane-trees, and a fountain that never stopped shining and singing. The cathedral had four yellow steps up from the cobbles of the market-place, and then a broad landing with a yellow

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lion crouched on either side of it, and then four more steps up to the door of the leather curtain, from which there came out always a smell of incense to the sunshine.

The market had red umbrellas, and under the red umbrellas, long ago before the war, there used to be the most beautiful things of all the world for sale; scarlet tomatoes, purple egg-plants, strings of opal and amethyst onions, frosted velvet cabbages, and orange gourds, big earthen red jars, and hammered glowing copper pots, apricots, and grapes and little purple figs and pomegranates.

Out beyond the town, there was the Roman bridge, of one great springing golden arch, that spanned from the buttressed walls of the town, across the river, to terraces of vines and olives, and an opening into the mountains for the road's splendid way, that led on and on.

The Roman road went on and on, into the great loneliness that never made one lonely.

Once upon a time, long before the war, there was a great golden star, quite alone, in the sunset, across the river, over the mountains, that had become shadows. It was Hesperus, who "bringest all things home that day has scattered wide, the sheep to its fold, the child to his mother."

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The sky stayed for a long time golden over the mountains, and Hesperus stayed for a long time a golden lamp in the midst of gold. But the earth was deep in shadow, and along the earth there was a great twilight fragrance of mountain herbs, and of resin of the stone-pines.

* * * * *

To be homesick in the long ward for the sense of death as beautiful and vague, the mood of being "half in love" with it, that was so young a mood, so unacquainted with grief. To forget all we know of death in beds we never even set a screen about, and find that thought of it again to turn to.

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PART III

Interlude

MADAME ANNA—THE LITTLE COUSIN OF NO. 12—"HE COST US SO MUCH"—"HERE ARE THE SHADOWS"—SHE WHO WOULD NOT EAT SOUP—THE VOW—"I TAKE PEN IN HAND"—FOOTSTEPS—THE 9 AND THE 10—THE MOMENT.

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MADAME ANNA

EVERY morning, when I came to the top of the stairs, I used to find Madame Anna there, waiting for the postboy. Every morning through four years she thought there might be a letter from her son.

The morning I began work at the hospital, in the first January of the war, she was there, a faded yellow fat woman, at the top of the stairs, and asked me, "Do you know if the postboy has started his rounds yet?"

A few days after she followed me into the Patronne's office, and said,

"It is four months to-day since I have had a letter from Marcel."

She was not old, perhaps forty-five, and she must once have been pretty. Her hair had been dyed yellow then, and in her eyes there was still the appeal of an old tawdry charm, piteous enough now. We never came to be fond of one another, Madame Anna and I, but, waiting there

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for her letter, she was part of my life through all the war, and I, arriving just ahead of the postboy, part of hers.

She was first "office and pantry girl," if any one outside our hospital knows what that means. It means for one thing that, in intervals of linen and soup, she might have sat down on the second chair in the Patronne's room. But in those minutes she would hurry downstairs and across the three great courtyards to the porter's lodge at the gate, in case there might be a letter that the postboy had overlooked when he made his rounds.

After a while she showed me the last letter she had had from Marcel, written in that first September. It was like so many other laboured little scrawls, of infinite value.

"I never had a husband," said Madame Anna, stuffing the letter back into her blouse, "but I made a fine fellow of my son."

One July day she told me, as I came up the stairs, "In hot weather his hair used to curl so tight."

She never said good morning to me, only something, every day, about Marcel: that he had always laughed so much at the cinema, or that he had loved pancakes, or that this was his birthday.

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In September, the second September, on the tenth, she told me, "It is a year to-day since I got a letter."

The tenth of September of the next year, crossing the courtyards, when the leaves of the limes fell slowly, I knew just what she would say. And there was the fourth, and then there was the fifth, September.

One morning in this last November, when I had answered Madame Anna that the postboy was coming, and had passed her, and was pinning on my veil in the Patronne's room, I heard her behind me saying, to quick, light steps on the stairs, "Well, what do you want?"

I looked back, and there was a tidy little woman, in a black jacket and bonnet, standing before Madame Anne, at the top of the stairs.

She was standing quite silent before Madame Anne. I could not see her face from where I stood in the Patronne's room, for her back was toward me, I only knew by something about her shoulders that there was tragedy.

Madame Anne said again, "Well, what do you want?"

The woman said, "They told me to come, I had the telegram. My son, Charles Videl, is he——?"

Madame Anna said, "18, door on your right."

I knew that 18 was going to die.

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His mother thanked Madame Anna, and went to the door of my ward.

I waited a minute. I was afraid to pass Madame Anna. I thought, how she must envy the woman who can have those last minutes with her son who can do those last things for him, and go to the end with him, and have him to watch over, where he lies quietly. I thought it must be like a touch, cruel on her anguish.

But she said to me, "You saw that poor woman? How can they bear it, those poor women who lose their sons?"

Next morning there were all the guns and bells of the armistice, and at noon Madame Anna and I and the others of us touched glasses of port wine in the Patronne's room, and said, "They kill one another no more."

That day 18 died.

Madame Anna said to me, "His poor mother—how can she go on living?"

That was very long ago. This winter has been so long. One day towards spring, when they were setting out tulips in the entrance court, for the first spring since all these years, and the blackbirds were come back, I was late at the hospital, and came up the stairs with the postboy, and Madame Anna was not there.

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The postboy muttered something, and stared at her empty place.

We both of us stopped quite still. It was as if we were standing by a grave.

At eleven o'clock Madame Anna came through the wards with her cart of tin plates and slices of grey bread, and the big pot of cabbage stew.

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THE LITTLE COUSIN OF NO. 12

WHEN the 12 was brought in, a few days before the armistice, already it was too late. In the field hospital he had been amputated of his right arm close to the shoulder, and his right leg close to the thigh. And then the journey had been too long,—the confusion behind battles, those waits on side tracks for munition trains, troop trains, going up.

He was whiter than any of the dead I had ever seen, and so transparent that it was as if he were not real at all, as if, trying to touch him, one's hand would pass through. There was nothing of him that seemed any more to belong to life, and yet he was terribly alive. It was with the intensity, almost the exultation of life, that comes, sometimes, just before death, the last, too high, too bright flaring up of the flame in a lamp that will shortly break.

He found the ward so white, so enormously long and so white. He heard the farthest sounds, from

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away down the corridor, from the other wards, and from our courtyard, where there were the foundling children. There was such pain in the fingers of the hand where there was no hand, and such ecstasy when Madame Marthe had moved the sheet away from the place where there was no leg for it to touch. He thought Madame Marthe and me most wonderful. He had something very important to tell us, when he could remember. At his dressings he talked and laughed all the time, and was very proud that we found him brave. He was so sorry for those who shrieked when their wounds were dressed. He was very happy because his family were coming. He thought the Patronne was so kind to have sent for them, and that they were so kind to come, all that journey, three hours in the market-cart, and eight by train. He must eat a great deal to be quite well by the time they arrived.

They were his father and mother. He was twenty years old, of Class 17. He was sure the cousin would come too. He said I looked like the little cousin, only of course she was young and pretty.

He said she would come, of course. She would come a longer journey even than that, he knew, to see him. She would have come any

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journey to him anyway, but now that he had both his medals, how proud she would be, the little cousin.

One day he would have me stay all the time beside him because he thought I was the little cousin already come. He talked to me so much in *patois* that I had trouble to follow him.

He asked me—had we come in the cart with old Suzette, the brown mare? He said they had written him that Suzette had a colt, and had the colt followed us? He seemed to think it was summer, and asked me about the hay and the wheat. He asked me if I went every night on the white donkey, between the big copper milk-jars, down to the bars by the stream to milk the cows.

Madame Marthe said, "That's not your cousin; don't you know who that is?"

He looked from one of us to the other vaguely troubled, but I said, "Never mind, she's only teasing."

He talked a great deal about his War Cross and his Military Medal. "It is that you may be proud of me, little cousin. Little cousin, I used to be afraid, sometimes, that if something like this happened to me in battle, you would no more love me. But, instead, you are proud of me, eh, little cousin?"

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Next morning we waited for the house doctor to come to do his dressings so it was after eleven o'clock when we began, and lunch was going round in the ward. Madame Anna was angry about something and scolded the pantry-girl, and the pantry-girl answered her, and the Patronne came, to scold also, so it happened that there was no one outside to prevent his people coming into the ward.

The door at the end of the ward opened, and there they came in, and stopped and stood, seeing him from four or five beds away.

There was his mother, sturdy and placid, smooth hair still dark on her forehead under the edge of her round white cap with the small stiff muslin bow behind. She carried an enormous green cotton umbrella, and what appeared to be a flower-pot, wrapped carefully in newspaper. There was his father, with the rosy round face and white side-whiskers that so often give an English look to Norman peasants, huge boots that creaked, and double row of shiny buttons down the front of his black Sunday smock. He was carrying a very ancient black leather bag. There was the little cousin, not more than seventeen, following them, in a trim black jacket and skirt and hat with a ribbon. She had corn yellow braids wound round her head that made her hat perch oddly high, and

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corn-flower blue eyes, quite round. She was carrying a big straw basket.

They saw him and stopped and stood.

It was the most dreadful moment of his dressings, there was no possible hiding of how dreadful it was. It all just had to be gone on with.

We are grown used to it, to seeing men that are broken pieces, enough left of a lamp for life to burn on for a while in—but his people came on him, like that, not ever having imagined.

He saw them, "Oh, there you are, there you are!" He tried to move his hand and wave to them. "Oh, there you are, all three of you!"

The Patronne turned from the service-cart, and called to them, "Go wait outside, till it's done."

But he cried, "No, no, don't wait, come now, I want you! Mother, so here you are in Paris, and father, with the old black bag. And little cousin!"

"Go back," said the Patronne. Her voice had the especial harshness it always has when she wants to be kind. "Wait in the corridor till I come."

But the boy took no heed. "I knew you'd come, little cousin. Why are you staring like that? Some one get a chair for my little cousin, and set it close."

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The three of them stood quite still, beyond reach of help, in the silence of the ward.

The men had stopped even their clatter of forks and plates.

"Little cousin," repeated the boy, his voice grown feebler suddenly. "Little cousin."

It was she who moved. She gathered herself all together, and it was as if, through the horror that had been in her face, there shone out, covering the horror that he might never know of it, a brightness just pleasant and commonplace, to make as if there were no tragedy at all. She came straight to him, past the old people, smiling. Her kind, simple peasant face was just as it must have been when she used to come to meet him, across the harvest field, or through the orchard, in other noons. She came between the beds to us, and stopped at the foot of his bed, and stood and smiled, her basket held before her in her two hands. Things it was packed with were covered with a scarlet cotton handkerchief. "Here is all the cream for you," she said, "and a jar of butter that I made, and apples from the corner by the sea wall."

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"HE COST US SO MUCH—"

THERE was a boy in the ward through most of the armistice winter whom Madame Marthe always addressed as "Monsieur."

He was so different from the others, he might easily have come from a class much above theirs; it really was odd having him there in the ward. His eyes met mine with an amused twinkle over things that nobody else in the ward knew to be droll. Nobody else in the ward ever had known that the old blue mansards opposite the windows were beautiful, the hooded chimneys and the red bricks and grey stone that three hundred years had travelled.

He was of the Class 15, he had been at the front for two years, he had the War Cross with two stars and a palm.

Everything about him was bright, his hair, his eyes, his nice teeth, his smile, that never lost its radiance till quite the end.

He was one of the least badly wounded of those

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brought in from the last battles it was more than a month before things began to go wrong. Then it was dreadful. Even then days and days passed before we could believe that he was going to die.

They sent for his father and mother to come from Dauphiné, from a little town of some Saint's name in the Department of the Isère.

I had known, of course, that the boy was of simple people, but still I was somewhat surprised by the mother's cap with the wide stiff muslin flair, the father's broad felt hat with ribbon streamers. I was surprised, too, to find that they were old people, really old people, who might have been his grandparents.

"He is your youngest child?" I asked them the day of their arrival, trying to talk them a little out of their shyness.

It was at the ward door, they were come back from getting their lunch somewhere. The old woman was still hugging to her heart a black cotton bundle that all the morning in the ward she had never been willing to put down. The old man stood with his hat in his hands, fumbling its ribbons, as he had fumbled them all morning.

They stood heavily, both of them, as if the fatigue of their long journey, the anxiety that they had no way of expressing, the grief that

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they could scarcely realize, all were too much for them, and weighed them down.

The father answered me—I never once, in all the time, heard the mother speak—"He is our only child, Madame."

"He is a splendid boy, how proud you must be of him."

"Yes, Madame."

"You have brought him up beautifully well."

"Yes, Madame."

The Patronne told them that first day, very gently, she who was so rough usually, that there was little hope for him, almost no hope. "You must not break down before him," she said to them. But she need not have said that.

For days and days the boy tried desperately hard to live, and smiled up at his old people, sitting beside him. And always they smiled back at him.

His mother sat with her brown knotted hands folded upon her black satin apron, and smiled at him. His father sat with his brown knotted hands upon his corduroy knees, and smiled at him.

Whenever I could, I would stop and talk to the old people. The old man answered me always in a few clumsy words, the old woman only looked at me, never answering at all.

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Once the boy explained, in his correct French, which sounded strange in the *patois* and *argot* of the ward, "They always had to work so hard that they had no time for learning words to tell of things. That is why they wanted me to have a chance to learn, as they have never had. And that is why I worked so hard at school, and at the college in Grenoble; I wanted to be for them that which they themselves had had no chance to be."

Then he said, in an odd sort of way, as if he were talking down from a height to me, "No one can know what my life owes to their devotion and endurance and sacrifice, and of their hope."

One day, toward the end, he talked to me of avalanche and drought, of this and that malady of the vines, of the sheep lost in snowstorms, and the sun's burning the corn black. He made me understand the ceaseless battle, that was all the story of the mountain farm, and the sacrifice that was all the story of the old people, their ceaseless unremitting stony labour, that left the small boy free every day to walk his hour down and his two hours back to and from the school on the highroad, and then, later, left the big boy free for his wonderful going away to college, out of farthest sight of their imagining.

In the last days, he never spoke to me, to any

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of us, at all, or seemed even to know that we were there. He only thought of his old people, and would save the few words he could say for them. He always had his young, radiant smile for them.

When everything was over I said good-bye to the old people in the bare lime avenue outside the gates of Pantin.

It was in February, a day of rain and wind.

The old woman's cap had lost its stiffness in the rain, and the wind tugged at the ribbons of the old man's hat as he held it in his two hands before him.

The old woman held her still unopened bundle clutched as if it were a baby to her breast. I never shall know what there was in it, wrapped up in black cotton.

They stood side by side, the two of them, grown oddly smaller, as if grief had shrunk them. They stooped on sagging knees, as if there were no reason left for bearing up against the sorrow and weariness. Their faces were swollen and stained, not with tears, but with travail of the grief that has no coming forth.

They did not speak. I tried to think of something I could say.

Groping for some comfort for myself in all of this, I said a stupid thing.

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I said, "It is a glory—great glory——"

For a moment I saw again that wonderful light upon life, the shining through upon life from the way their passing opens.

"For France," I said, and the old thrill of the words came back to me.

And then the boy's mother burst out sobbing. It was a heart-broken sobbing, the more piteous because she never before had made a sound. She rocked herself wearily from side to side, and said the only thing I ever had heard her say. "He cost us so much to bring up," she said, tears pouring down her face. She hugged her bundle close, and had no hand with which to wipe the tears away. The tears seamed and tore her face. "He cost us so much to bring up," she said again, rocking and sobbing.

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"HERE ARE THE SHADOWS!"

THIS is a thing I never understood.

Our ward girl's sweetheart was in the 1st Zouaves. All through the war she used to bring me his letters to read to her, because she did not want the others to know she could not read. They all had great contempt for her. Madame Marthe found her very badly brought up—I think because she had no hat, even for her day off. Madame Marthe always wore a hat on her day off.

I liked to think of Titine's wild red curls on a holiday, freed from the hospital cap that never really kept them in order. The Patronne always had to scold her about the way the red curls broke loose all round the edge of the tight little cap, and where it was untidily pinned in the nape of her neck.

Titine always used to "answer back." Her temper was as wild as her hair. She had a voice that drowned even the Patronne's, and a wonderful gift of words.

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Her Zouave was a dock boy from Havre. I do not know where she had known him, or how long they had been together. She never told me anything, only brought me, every few days, a letter from him to read.

They were as illiterate poor little letters as ever were written; there seemed to be scarcely a word in the language that Titine's Zouave could spell, and he put his words together by a system I spent spent four years working out.

There was one thing I understood from the first, —that he would have Titine think he was never in danger, always well, living in idleness and luxury, far from battle. I never told Titine what it meant to be of the 1st Zouaves. She never believed what the others told her.

I used to see him when he came on leave, a very rough customer, with the red cord over his shoulder, and every time a new star, or a palm on his red and green ribbon. If one mentioned the star and palm, he always said a word which is not written, except on walls in such streets as those around the hospital. He never had much to say to me, I do not think he knew I read his letters to Titine.

In the last September he was wounded. He wrote to Titine from a hospital near the front and

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told her it was nothing at all, he would soon be with her again. He wrote every day, even the day he died.

There were ten letters, nine of them were the usual scrawls.

The tenth came enclosed in a letter from some one in the hospital, I think she must have been a Red Cross nurse. She wrote to tell Titine that her Zouave had died quite without pain. She said he had been happy all the morning, writing his letters to her, Titine, and that about noon he had seemed very quiet, they had thought at first he was falling asleep. She sent the letter to Titine, the envelope he had sealed and addressed enclosed in hers.

I read it to Titine in the pantry, with the door shut. I had never known her to be quiet like that before. She never made a sound. And all the life, the colour and curl, seemed to be gone, suddenly, out of her hair.

Until its very last words the letter was scrawled like all the others—to wish her good morning, he was well, his beautiful brass bed shone like a king's gold bed in the sun. They were washing the floor and it was like a bright pool. He hoped she was well. He sent her a thousand kisses. There were oughts and crosses scrawled for her to kiss.

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And then there was written, clearly, straight and firm across the page—

"Here are the shadows gathering,"

and he ended the letter like that, without even signing his name.

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SHE WHO WOULD NOT EAT SOUP

THE windows under the arcades of the second courtyard open to dormitories that are lined with rows of very small black iron cots, each one numbered and placarded, and to a refectory where there are rows of very long, very low, bare board tables and benches. In fine weather, at noon and at three o'clock, the children—always more than a hundred of them, foundlings and abandoned children and children of criminal parents—are out in the courtyard, in their clumsy blue-checked blouses, boys and girls alike, all the blouses too long or too short, too baggy or too pinched.

They are sickly, often defective children, sent in from various other institutions and asylums of the *Assistance Publique* to be cared for temporarily in the hospital—unpleasant children, the nurses of their service complain bitterly of them. They are so rough and noisy, out at their recess in the courtyard, that it seems they must be happy, all of them alike, in their ugly blouses.

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But one cold afternoon in the armistice winter, as I came down our stairs after dark, I heard a woman's voice in the courtyard shouting, "Stop out there, then, little beggar, and freeze to death if you like," and a door slam to.

There was a small child crouched on the cobbles, in the light of the lamp at the refectory door. It was a girl of ten or twelve; she went on sobbing when I picked her up.

I knocked on the door, and the nurse put out her head, her face red and angry in the lamp light.

"There now," she said to the child, keeping the door shut all but a little against the cold, "there now, the lady sees what sort of a girl you are."

She was a thin little white thing, with a sharp face, and her head set too far back, so that her little shapeless body curved forward, out like the breast of a pigeon. She was shivering with cold while she sobbed.

"You see what it is," said the nurse to me, "miss is too grand for us! Miss will not eat her soup, not she! It is not good enough, our soup, for her! What does she want, the grand young miss? What can we serve her with? I should like to know! She not to eat our soup indeed! I tell her she may stop outside in the cold till she begs for it, till she knows how, if it were not

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for us, she would be out in the gutter to freeze and starve."

The child had put her arms up over her face, and was sobbing into them. Her elbows stuck out awkwardly in their blue checked cotton sleeves, that were too long.

"But soup is good," I said to her, "and dear, don't you know, all good little girls like soup?"

Suddenly the child flung her arms about my knees and clung to me. "Oh, I am good!" she sobbed; "I am good, I do like soup. It is not that; it is that in this place I am not hungry. I do not know them here, and I knew those others. And there I had a yellow bowl for my soup, and my blouse was striped. And the girl who did the floors, she kissed me once. And there was a green stain, very funny, on the wall beside my bed. So I can't eat here; I can't! Oh, please, I want to go back."

The nurse, through her scant opening of the door said, "She is just come in new to-day, and nothing suits her. You would think instead of from an asylum she had come from a palace." She opened the door wider, and her face, the anger passing, was not unkind.

Inside I could see the other children sitting along the refectory tables, bending rows of little heads over rows of brown bowls of soup. "Look at

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them," I said to the little girl, "what a happy time they're having!" But she only sobbed when I tried to pet and comfort her.

"You'd best leave her to me," said the nurse, "I've a bit of chocolate I'll give her. Come and see her to-morrow, she'll be all right then." She reached out and took the child—a bundle of striped or checked cotton, for anyone to pick up and put anywhere—away from me, with her big red hands. "She's strange now," she said, "and home-sick, but she'll get used to it soon here, just as she got used to it wherever it was they had her before. There'll be the same fuss again when they send her on from here. It's no use taking notice, they are all like that, all of them, the sort that gets home-sick."

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THE VOW

BEFORE I came to work in the hospital, in the early days of the war, there was a volunteer nurse in our service, of whom Madame Marthe told me this.

"It was a lady of the most grand world," said Madame Marthe, in the pantry, stirring the omelette of No. 12, "she was princess or duchess, or something like that. You could see she was almost a queen. You could see that—name of a pipe, I don't know how you could see it, but you could. She worked as no one of us had ever seen any one work before. She was here in the mornings before any of us of the day-service, and she would stay I don't know how long at night, after the last of us was gone. She would stay all night too, to take the place of any one of us who was tired, or if there were one of the men who wanted her. You know how it is often when they are very bad, they just want some one to stay by the bed and answer, and perhaps move things

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about a little. She was as good a nurse as any one we had. I could not dress a wound better myself nor could the Patronne. Yet she would do all the work of a ward-girl too. She used to scrub the floors. No one of us paid ones ever scrubbed a floor like that. She'd take the work of the most miserable of us, and do it as if it were the thing in the world most magnificent to do. The scrub-girl of her ward left her always more and more of her work, till she came to be the drudge of the ward. Her head nurse also left her to do everything, except things that got notice and praise.

"Other volunteers," said Madame Marthe, with her contemptuous shrug, "other volunteers, they want the praise, but not the work. They want all the talk about devotion, but she wanted the work. She got it—name of a pipe, she got it. And she was neither young nor strong, that volunteer. She must have been forty-five. You could see she was not strong by the way her mouth got blue, and her eyes got all stained around, as if they were bruised. We used to laugh among ourselves, and say what queer birds they were, those ladies of the world, to leave their fine houses and their servants and all, and come to the hospital and work like that. I was sorry for her, only, and one day I said to her, 'You do too much,

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you know,' and she answered me, 'I would do far, far more, that my son may be spared.'

"You see how it was? There, hold the plate. Name of a pipe, it's burnt! Can't be helped. She was a great lady, and proud and cold, but she talked to me that day just as any ward girl might. I think she was grateful because I had noticed. She was so tired that she sat down on the edge of an empty stretcher bed, just as you and I do, and she told me that it was because of a vow. She had made a vow, you see, to the Blessed Virgin that she would do anything, everything, so long as her son was spared at the war. There, hold the plate."

"Did she make herself ill?" I asked, "did she kill herself working?"

"Oh, no!" said Madame Marthe, scraping the omelette on to my plate from the pan, "it was her son who was killed. One day, she cleaned out all my dressings table for me, and did my floors, and my wood-work. The next day she did not come. She had had word when she went home that her son was killed. Where's the salt? She never came again to the hospital."

Standing there with 12's omelette, I felt the rage that mounts and blinds one when things seem too cruel.

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Madame Marthe was wiping her hands on her petticoat. "And name of a pipe," she said, "do you know, of the two of them, I think it was worse for the Blessed Virgin."

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"I TAKE PEN IN HAND"

INTO the small ward down the corridor the two boys with meningitis had been moved to die. They lay there dying, side by side.

There are three beds in the corridor-ward. I wished that they had left the empty bed between. But it was the bed next the window they left empty, and the big chasseur and the little Breton pioupiou lay close together.

The door stood always open, that any of us, going up and down the corridor, might glance in, passing, to see if there were anything to be done. There was so much work just then—left over after the war was done—that no one had time to remain in the room with the two boys.

The chasseur had his family about him, all in mourning. They stood beside his bed, his father and mother, his sister and the wife of his brother, who had been killed. The brother's wife was the only one of them who made a noise. All down the corridor we could hear her sobbing, and in

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the ward, and it was dreadful. The most dreadful thing, the thing I hoped the men in the ward would not understand, was the flinging about of the big chasseur against the boards they had fastened along the sides and at the head and foot of his bed, to keep him from throwing himself out of it. The boards were so high that one could only see him when one went near and looked in. It was already like a pine-box. He thrashed himself about ceaselessly, not knowing what he did, not even knowing, I try to think, that he suffered. The thumping, thumping, inside the pine-box was just one of those details of the whole that seem unbearable.

The light of even the dull winter days so troubled the chasseur between his boards, that they had hung a black rubber sheet over the window, and it was almost dark in the room.

There were two or three chairs in the room, but none of the family in mourning would sit down. They seemed to think they should remain standing all the time, out of respect for that which was already in the room.

The other boy, the little Breton, was conscious of none of it. He lay perfectly still, his eyes closed through the days and the nights. In every moment I could take, I went down to the corridor-room, and stayed with him a little. There was nothing

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any one could do for him, but it seemed as if there ought to be some one just standing there.

None of his people came to him. We never knew why they did not come. The Patronne wrote and telegraphed, and I wrote, and Madame Marthe wrote, and then I telegraphed twice, but no one came. We knew he was a peasant boy from the Morbihan—Landiviou, the place was called, the station, Perrick-Rosven. He had told Madame Marthe that his parents understood no French, only *patois*. It must have been through some cruel lack of understanding that they never came to say good-bye to their son.

He would not have known them if they had come, except possibly during just those few minutes when, oddly enough, he recognized me, in the morning of the day he died.

It seemed peculiarly sad that no one of his own was there the day he was given his medals.

The medals, the Military Medal and the War Cross, were given to him the day before he died, and he did not even know.

The officer who had been sent with the medals read out his "Citation" to Madame Marthe and me,—it was the Patronne's day off. The family of the big chasseur did not take any heed, for it was just at one of their boy's worst moments. The brother's wife kept sobbing all the time.

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They were serving lunch just then in the wards, so none of the wounded came. The officer pinned the medals on the nightshirt of the boy who did not know he had them at all, and kissed him, and the boy never opened his eyes.

The next morning I went when first I arrived to the door of the corridor-room. There was the black sheet still over the window, and the family of the chasseur in their mourning was still standing about his bed. He seemed a little quieter inside his boards.

The boy whose people had never come was lying perfectly still, but I saw that his eyes were open. He looked as if he were made of wax. He saw me and knew me. His lips moved with my name.

When I bent close over him I could understand what he said.

"I want you to write a letter for me. There is paper in that box, and an envelope, there on the night-table,—no, no, underneath, there by the boots, there, don't you see?" He pointed at it with his wax hand. "I will give you three sous for the postage-stamp," he said, "to-morrow. You can write on the cover of the box."

I stood against the wall to write, standing because of that something in the room before which one had to stand.

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He dictated his letter distinctly, very carefully, choosing each word—for these people who could not read—and watching me, with his bright eyes, to be sure I missed none of it.

"My Dear Parents,—

"I take pen in hand to give you my news, which is good. Paris is a very large city. This is a very large hospital. When I go out I will send you picture post cards. I should be obliged if you would send me one of those large brown cakes. I hope that Yves is in good health. I hope that Marie-Joseph is in good health. I hope that the little Joséphine is in good health. In the hope that my letter finds you in good health as it leaves me, Your respectful and obedient son."

He died perhaps an hour after.

The boy between the boards died at noon of that same day. His people had quite a fine funeral for him, three days afterwards, with a number of friends come up for it from the country somewhere.

For the boy whose family did not come there was no one to arrange things, so everything was got through hurriedly. It was the very morning after his death that I followed alone, behind the black carriage and the Republican guard and the *croque-*

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morts, all the long way to Pantin. None of the other nurses could leave their work that morning, and none of the wounded were well enough to walk so far. Afterwards, at the gate, there was no one to whom the officer of the guard could give the boy's medals.

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FOOTSTEPS

IN THE May of two years ago the strikers forced the great entrance gates of the hospital, and drove back the military guard there, and swarmed in, through all the courts and services. The nurses of all the services had for days been wearing red ribbons, but not one of them went to meet the red flag on the stairs.

Now there were no red ribbons to be seen in the hospital, and the strikers never came to the gates. There were only, at the time, footsteps, up and down, going their ways along the great boundary walls under the outer windows.

It was a most beautiful month of May. The ward was full of blue sky every day and all day long. Spring came into the ward, from the tops of the little lime trees at the windows on the side of it over the court, and from the new commotion of sparrows and pigeons out there, and of the *Assistance* children, whose spring twittering one heard through the open windows of their service.

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The light spring shade of the lime trees was pleasant in our court, and the entrance court was gay with tulips, and in the great round central court they had to trim the grass often, and the smell of it was good.

If only there had been benches in the courts, the men could have got out to sit. Most of them were well enough to be about. Because of the strikes no one was allowed out of the hospital and there in the ward, day after day—through all the fêtes of Pentecost too—they were fretting themselves half mad.

The quarter of the hospital is one from which always all riots and revolutions have broken out, and surged through Paris. In the May of 1917 the strikers flooded those streets with their banners and songs, "Les Patrons sont des cochons, mironton, mironton, mirontaine," and "Down with this," and "Down with that," to the air of "Auprès de ma blonde." But now the streets were very quiet.

We were not allowed to open the windows on the street side of the ward. That was a small street, through which the traffic of the quarter—the big drays from the canal docks—never passed, but there were always many people out in it, going up and down it; we were used to its being full of footsteps and voices. Now there was

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hardly ever a voice raised in it, and the footsteps had a quite different sound.

There was a strange sort of silence that would fall at times upon the ward, and in it we seemed to hear every footstep. Singly and in groups—small groups, for grouping was forbidden—they came, met, halted, separating quickly—standing about was forbidden—and went on. Coming and going, they had the steadiness of marching. When they halted, there was something that suggested marking time.

At moments the silence was quite terrible in the ward. In it I felt extraordinarily apart from the men, and from Madame Marthe, and the Patronne, and all my comrades, as if the footsteps, up and down, went between us. The worst was at Pentecost. The Pentecosts of other years, with outside enemies so near, had been less sinister.

There was a forlorn little creature in the ward, the 6, his name was Robert Roger. He had been with us all the third winter of the war, for a lung wound, had got well of that and gone back. But this winter, when the war was over, he had caught pneumonia, and been nearly dying of it for weeks, in his old corner of the ward. Now he was up, and might have been out but for the strikes—in Paris his own city. We have a habit of thinking that

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those Paris boys always find life gay, but Robert Roger must have been sickly and sad enough, even before he was wounded. The day he made me his speech he was a pitiful small, white, trembling object standing up, holding on to the iron bar of the foot of his bed.

On the bed were spread out all his treasures. He had been sitting beside his bed all the morning contemplating the collection, arranged and rearranged on the dingy top sheet. A leather bracelet, that may once have held a watch; one key, tied on a bit of string; one pocket handkerchief; eleven post-card pictures of himself in uniform, standing by a Grecian urn; three of those imitation leather pocket cases we used to give the soldiers in the first year of the war, with comb and mirror, or perhaps thread and needle and buttons, folded up inside; a knife, a pipe, a gilt frame too large for his post-card, and with nothing in it; and five shining bright new one-franc pieces.

"You gave me those!" he accused me, suddenly, out of one of the dreadful little silences.

I was standing near the foot of his bed, by the long dressing-table. All the work of the morning was done, but I had not wanted to go home. Madame Marthe had been trying to talk to me—I had felt how hard she was trying—about her small

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son, Louis-Charles, who gives her so much trouble. She had been saying it was the fault of the street boys—and how could she keep him out of the streets, when he would run away from school, name of a pipe, and her husband ill, and she at the hospital from seven to seven, eleven francs fifty centimes a day with her "vie chère" or they'd starve, so she supposed it was he to the devil. Then she stopped, and suddenly we had been listening to the footsteps.

Some of the men had been talking, in groups of two or three together. They were most of them up; it was nearly time for the soup. But they all stopped talking when Madame Marthe stopped, and we heard only the footsteps. There were the noises of the children's service under the other windows, but it was the footsteps we listened to.

Then Robert Roger burst forth, "You gave me those!" and picked himself up, and stood, holding on to the foot bar of his bed, and pointing to the franc pieces.

I looked into his big hollow eyes, that met mine straight, and knew that we were enemies.

Day after day, this winter and that other, Robert Roger had tried to smile up at me, when he saw I suffered because he did. He had had a way of saying, "Poor Madame," because he was sorry for my being sorry. For the smallest services, how

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many times he had tried to thank me, in moments when it had seemed to me terrible that he did not scream. He had said, "Poor Madame, don't trouble," when I went with him to the operation —that other winter—that they had thought he never would get through. And this winter, when Death had stayed so long, so close to him, it had been me he wanted, day after day, to feed him little messes with a teaspoon. And all the time we had been enemies.

He must have come to know it in these days, listening to the footsteps. I would not have known it, understood it, even facing him there, if it had not been for the footsteps. And now we must know it always.

"You gave me those," he repeated, risen, small and white and trembling, to face me and point to the franc pieces, "and you have given me others. You have been good to me. You have come down here to the hospital, and been good to me. Why should it be you who is good to me? What are you, that you have a right to be good to me?"

Then there was silence again, and I just stood there, and the men did not speak, nor did Madame Marthe. And Robert Roger subsided into his chair again, to finger over his possessions, embarrassed, thinking that he had spoken stupidly.

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THE 9 AND THE 10

I FOUND the 9 standing in the corridor window, over the street that, in those days of the strikes, we were forbidden to look out on, and I stopped and stood there with him. His fine young face was cold and hard with anger, and the long, nervous fingers of his left hand plucked at the sling that held his right arm in its case of heavy plaster. We stood for some minutes there together, watching the people of the footsteps.

Up and down the deep narrow cobbled street they came and went, to and from the Labour Exchange, and to and from the various "meetings" of the quarter, about their definite purpose, with their definite menace.

The 9 was a boy of what they call the great world—"of the nobles, the rich," 10 had said that morning, contemptuously—oddly out of place in the ward, there for some special treatment that the chief surgeon hoped, even yet, might save his right

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arm. We never before had had any one of his sort in the ward. During the war, it would not have mattered, but now there were the footsteps.

When he spoke, after a little, he said, "In the trenches, we were all together, they and we. We would, any one of us—of them or of us—have died at any time for any other, and now they can forget." He had not answered one word to all the 10 had been saying in the ward; it was still difficult for him to control his voice. "Now they hate us," he said; "you heard the 10, next me, how he talked? The more we do for them, the more they hate us. They hate us even for what we do for them." And then he said the thing that rang in curiously with what the 10 said afterwards. "Fools, fools," he said, "they cannot understand."

The 10 was out in the entrance court when I passed on my way home, a big rough shaggy boy, from some factory work probably, dragging himself about on one leg and his crutches. He had a sullen dark low-browed face, and a snarl always for most things, but he had, too, a sudden quick smile that, for a long time, I had counted on.

In the entrance court the sound of the footsteps was lost in a confusion of sounds from a busy

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street. Sometimes all those sounds of outside life seemed to be only a background for the blackbirds' whistling, but now the court was full of its own footsteps, for it was the hour when the workpeople of the hospital come trailing across to their refectory and noon soup. The huge old hospital is not only a hospital, it is two worlds. Sometimes the world of the sick there seems less tragic than the world of those who take care of the sick, the scared, stained creatures to whom the hospital has been able to give back just so much of life as they may cling to here, in its refuge, hidden. Things better hidden, one coming from outside tries not to see them. How I have tried not to think of them, not to wonder, while the war went on: could it mean anything at all for them of exaltation and glory? What could sacrifice mean to them who had only this, of all the world, to offer up? Or freedom, with its wings? Or their country, who gave just this to them? Or the right, out of their mess of it? Things not wanted elsewhere, they came creeping by, while the 10 and I spoke together in the entrance court.

"You know," I said, to my poor 10, "the way you talked this morning to the 9 was not fair. They fought, too, beside you and fell, and died."

He balanced himself on his one leg, and on one

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crutch, and, with the other crutch, dug at the moss between the rough cobbles. He was hanging his head, and his eyes were narrowed under their crooked brows.

"In the trenches," he said, muttering so that I could scarcely hear him, "we were all together, they and we, it was to die, any one like any other. But when it comes to living, they think they have a right to all of it, and we to none. What have we ever had? What in the world did we ever have to fight for, and die for? What shall we have to live for now, after all that? Fools, fools, they cannot understand," he said in the very words of the 9.

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THE MOMENT

THE morning after peace was signed I came to the hospital at the same hour, by the same streets and markets, and along the canal, with its stone margin and very big old square cobbles, its plane trees in new leaf, its poor crooked stained houses, and its reflections of onyx and jade and amber. I thought, "All this is safe now, war will not hurt it."

I came to the high grey wall of the hospital, and saw the blue roofs over it, and the tops of the trees in the entrance court, and the chimneys, with their smoke of every day.

Some of our men were standing about outside the gate doing nothing, boys from country depth who did not know what to do in streets, and boys who still suffered too much to care to do anything. There was the crowd of civilians, as every day, streaming in to consultation, under-world people with their dirt and illnesses. There was the orderly on guard, the 7 from my ward, who had been

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with us through two years for his spine wound; and there was the concierge, Madame Charles, whose two sons had been killed. The postboy was just starting from the lodge with the letters. I thought of how Madame Anna used to be waiting for him, always, at the top of the stairs. I tried not to remember what it was that her one letter from Marcel, of that first September, had said about the day of victory.

In the entrance court the blackbirds were calling. There were the tulips, past their beauty, discoloured and drooping. Two of the men from my ward were crossing the cobbles. They were the two "faces," with their bandages. It was they who called to me, "And so, Madame, it is peace!" I would have liked to stop and say something, and they too would have liked to stop and say something, but we all three seemed to be suddenly confused, shy, as if the moment were an awkward one.

A number of the work-people were in the second court, under the vaulted passage. They were talking together, but they did not speak to me as I passed. They were people I knew only by sight, dreadful to look at. I wondered, were they talking of peace together? Was it because there was something they knew I could not understand, that they did not speak to me?

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In the second court there were all the *Assistance* children, out in their blouses that never fitted, and their clumping shoes. Some of them were playing games under the lime trees, one of the nurses was playing with them. Some of the more sickly ones had brought out a bench from the schoolroom and were sitting in a row at the door. All their little faces were happy, every one of them beamed at me and two or three of them called out, "Madame, Madame, we have no lessons today!"

Climbing the stairs I was home-sick for a sight of that something of which we used to get rare glimpses. I was home-sick for the time when one was happy just in the thought of dying, of being perhaps granted the privilege of giving one's life for the faith one had; when ideals were voices and banners and wings, and torches and stars, and sacrifice was ecstasy, and courage was singled out, and glory was a thing seen, lifted up, called by its shining name.

The stairs were wet all the way down, and had a horrid smell. It was the morning for washing the stairs, and there was Loulou scrubbing away. He is a half-witted boy of the *Assistance Publique.* He looked up from his knees at me as I passed, with his broad fixed vacant smile.

And yet I knew on the stairs, even more surely

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than I had ever known it before, that vision, as clear as Saul's on the road to Damascus, is very close to a world in which courage, sacrifice, glory are come to be just the average, anonymous, like the uncounted little wooden crosses in the fields and at road edges.

In her room the Patronne turned from her desk to me and said, "So then, this is the day that for nearly five years we have been talking of!"

I have never thought before of the Patronne's looking tired; she is such a big woman, and red, and her voice is so loud.

"So then," she said, "the war is finished. I suppose you and your sort will be done now with hospitals. They are not soldiers any more. There will be only the pauper sick in your ward again soon. Marthe can go back to emptying her own dirty dressings."

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